

Light The Fuse

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Light The Fuse

by [sensibleheart](#)

Summary

“Do you want me to try and sabotage him today?” Sapnap whispered, his offer making Dream chuckle.

“How would you even go about doing that?” he asked.

“I could... I don’t know, startle him so he trips in the throne room and makes an ass out of himself in front of the whole court.”

Dream hummed, a smile still etched on his face. “Well, I appreciate the offer, but let’s just see how this goes for now.”

Or: Dream doesn't ever want to get married. As Prince and heir to the throne, though, he is forced to meet with a potential betrothed, Duke George. Sapnap, Dream's best friend, makes it his mission to prevent the marriage from happening.

Notes

Heyy

I was originally working on this for SNF week but realized that it didn't really fit any of the prompts so here it is instead. It's probably going to be 6 chapters long, and right now I'm working on chapter 5 so I think it's safe to say I'll be posting a new chapter every week.

The vibes are BBC Merlin meets Bridgerton season 2, if that makes any sense.

Also, although it's never explicitly said within the fic, Dream is aroace in this—just thought I would make that extra clear ☺

Fic title from [this alt-J song](#)

Chapter 1 title from [this City and Colour song](#)

Happy reading!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Day old hate

Back when they were teenagers, when Dream's title still seemed like a distant mirage rather than a very real list of responsibilities, and when Sapnap hadn't been promoted to knight and personal guard of the Prince, Dream had told Sapnap that he didn't want to get married.

Sapnap hadn't understood at first.

"Why? Your parents want to marry you off already? You're only fifteen," he'd said, already getting worried.

"No, not right now," Dream had answered, "but it's going to happen sooner or later, and I don't think I'll want it any more when I'm eighteen or twenty or even twenty-five than I do now."

"What if you married for love, though?"

Love was a pretty abstract concept for Sapnap at the time. His experience of it amounted to stolen kisses with a village girl on market days, charged glances exchanged with one of his fellow knight trainees, and what he knew of it from poems and songs he heard during banquets and at the tavern. His parents had died when he was a child, so he didn't even have them to take as a model. As for the King and Queen, well... It was no secret that their marriage was one of political convenience. Which was why he assumed that Dream might simply not want to follow in his parents' footsteps.

"I don't know," Dream had shrugged. "I'm not sure I really understand what love is about, or if I can even... er, feel that way."

It wasn't something that they'd ever explicitly discussed, but of course Sapnap had noticed that Dream had never expressed a romantic interest in anyone before. He'd always thought that it was because his rank as a prince made it difficult to approach people, though.

"Well, you're still young, maybe you just haven't met the right person yet," he'd offered, hoping it would be enough to reassure Dream.

But a shadow had crossed over Dream's face, and when he'd murmured "Maybe so" in response, Sapnap could tell that he wasn't really convinced by that argument.

Then, throughout the years, things hadn't changed. While Sapnap met more people and his understanding of love, both physical and emotional, kept expanding, Dream continued saying that he didn't want to get married. Not only that, but that falling in love just wasn't in the cards for him.

After a while, Sapnap realized that his typical answer of "You just have to wait until you meet the right one" wasn't helpful in the slightest, and he'd accepted that it was just the way Dream was.

As time passed, though, and as they slowly turned into young adults, the thought made him increasingly anxious and kept him up at night, because he knew that it was just a matter of time until the King and Queen pressured Dream into getting engaged to someone.

And indeed, it eventually happened when Dream turned twenty-two.

“Who is he again?”

Dream, who was busy adjusting his shirt’s collar, met Sapnap’s eyes in the mirror. Sapnap could see the fear hidden in them, and it made his stomach lurch.

Sometimes, although Sapnap knew that Dream’s qualities would make him a great king, maybe even the greatest monarch that the kingdom had seen for centuries, he couldn’t help wishing that Dream had been born into a regular family instead. Because then, he wouldn’t have to spend his afternoons locked up in the council chamber and discussing boring topics. Then, he’d be able to go out of the castle’s grounds without facing threats on his life. And then, he wouldn’t be forced to meet a potential betrothed today and to pretend believing in the institution of marriage, when Sapnap knew that the very thought of it made his skin crawl.

Sapnap caught himself wishing that the two of them could just run away from it all. It seemed like a childish and useless thought, though, so he kept it to himself.

“Sir George from the Outer Realms,” Dream said in answer to his question. “He’s a duke.”

“Not even a prince?”

“Marrying another prince would be too politically risky, I think, but he does have royal blood,” Dream explained.

“And your parents are really expecting you to *marry* him, just like that?”

Dream winced. “I turned of age a year ago. When she talked to me yesterday, Mother made it clear that it was high time for me to find a spouse. And honestly, I don’t think she or Father really care who this spouse might be as long as our marriage would allow for a valuable alliance for the kingdom.”

“So what are you going to do?” Sapnap asked, helping Dream attach his ceremony sword to his belt.

“There’s not much I can do at this point, except hope that Sir George ends up not being up to my parents’ standards,” Dream shrugged.

“Do you want me to try and sabotage him today?” Sapnap whispered, his offer making Dream chuckle.

Seeing the corners of his eyes crinkle brought some comfort to Sapnap, although he couldn’t help reminding himself that it might be the last time he’d see Dream laugh for a while,

depending on how things went that day.

“How would you even go about doing that?” Dream asked.

“I could... I don’t know, startle him so he trips in the throne room and makes an ass out of himself in front of the whole court.”

Dream hummed, a smile still etched on his face. “Well, I appreciate the offer, but let’s just see how this goes for now.”

“You’re no fun,” Sapnap muttered, and Dream lightly punched his arm in retaliation.

It turned into play fighting, something they were still prone to do despite their newfound adult responsibilities. After a few minutes, though, once they got breathless from laughing, they turned serious again and got back to getting ready for the welcoming ceremony.

Soon enough, too soon for Sapnap’s liking, someone knocked on the door and told them it was time to go down and meet the newcomer. He squeezed Dream’s shoulder once, and they left Dream’s chambers in silence.

The moment he saw him, Sapnap decided that he didn’t like Sir George. There was something about the way he held his chin up high as he entered the room, his eyes boring into everyone without distinction, that made Sapnap want to lash out.

When George bowed to Dream, there was the hint of a smirk on his lips like he thought him or the situation worthy of laughing, which made him even less likable to Sapnap. Dream nodded back solemnly, and Sapnap admired the way he was able to hide how nerve-wracking this moment really was to him.

As Dream introduced him, George’s gaze trailed to Sapnap, slowly taking in his armored silhouette from top to bottom like he was judging every single part of it. Sapnap congratulated himself for having taken the time to polish it in the morning, but then he remembered that he didn’t care about this man’s opinion in the slightest. Their eyes met briefly, long enough for Sapnap to tell himself that he’d rarely seen such dark pupils, then George turned to face the King and Queen.

“Your Majesties,” he said, kneeling on the stone floor and fully bowing his head down, exposing the nape of his neck.

His skin struck Sapnap as being extremely pale, almost fragile. This was a man who’d been living a privileged life much like Dream’s, except Dream loved exercising and the outdoors, making him tan, whereas George clearly spent the majority of his time lazing between four walls. As he engaged in conversation with the monarchs, he spoke in a surprisingly low-pitched voice and an accent that Sapnap thought made him sound snobbish.

Sapnap stole a glance at Dream, but his expression revealed nothing, so he’d have to wait until later that night in order to find out what Dream thought of the newcomer.

After spending a few minutes recounting boring details of his journey, George turned back to Dream and said, “Your Royal Highness, if you’d allow me, I would like to show you the present I brought for you.”

Dream raised an eyebrow, clearly not having expected such a thing.

“Of course, but you didn’t have to bring me anything, My Lord.”

George scoffed like it was preposterous, and Sapnap hated how casually he did it. This was a royal court full of complete strangers to him, for God’s sake, so why did he act like he already belonged in it?

“Your gift is outside, if you’d follow me...” he told Dream, turning his back to them and starting to walk towards the door.

Sapnap saw the Queen frown at this lack of respect, and internally rejoiced. He might not have to try and sabotage George after all, as the man seemed to be perfectly able to do it for himself.

When they joined him in the courtyard, George was waiting for them by the well, holding the reins of an immaculate white horse.

“I heard you liked riding, Your Royal Highness,” he said with an annoying air of superiority, handing the reins to Dream who took them after a second of hesitation.

“Please, call me Dream. And you heard right, I do enjoy riding immensely, so thank you for this lovely present,” Dream answered in a careful tone, and Sapnap knew him well enough to know that he was flabbergasted.

“I’ll call Jamie so she can find him a spot in the stable with the rest of your horses, Your Royal Highness,” Sapnap chimed in, hoping that his remark would be enough to show George that his gift wasn’t that grandiose for someone like Dream.

“Oh yes, thank you Nick,” Dream replied absently, still looking at the horse with what now amounted to stars in his eyes.

Granted, this was by far the most beautiful horse Dream had ever had, but Sapnap was fuming. Surely Dream wouldn’t forget that easily what was truly at stake here?

Maybe he did a bad job at hiding his irritation, as George turned to him and asked, “Is everything alright, Sir Sapnap?”

“Yes, My Lord, everything’s alright,” Sapnap replied, trying his best to keep his tone even.

It didn’t seem to work, though, because George raised an amused eyebrow. He didn’t further comment on it, though, which was lucky because the King and Queen had just joined their little group and were now going into raptures over the horse.

Sapnap took a step back and sighed. Maybe he’d been wrong and it wouldn’t be so easy to get rid of George after all, as his charm seemed to be working wonders with the royal family.

At least, Sapnap figured that he was young and decent to look at, which was always better than a creepy old man hoping to marry someone who was decades younger. Sapnap had heard of such horror stories from other kingdoms, and he'd always prayed that this wouldn't happen to Dream.

Still, though, Sapnap was determined to find a way to prevent this marriage and, ideally, to prevent *any* marriage from happening, just like his best friend deserved.

The banquet that night was magnificent—the long tables were covered in dishes that Sapnap had rarely seen come out of the kitchens before, the gold-plated glasses were filled with wine and sickly sweet liquor, and the guests were provided with cheerful entertainment in the form of music, dances, funny tales and, of course, love poems.

From his spot against the wall, Sapnap had a perfect view over it all, but he found it difficult to focus on anything that wasn't Dream or George. The two were sitting side by side near the King and Queen, and they spent the entire evening talking, their heads leaning close so they could hear each other better.

At first, their conversation seemed stilted but then, minute by minute, Sapnap could tell that Dream was getting more and more relaxed, and soon enough he was full-on laughing at whatever George was telling him. Then, it was Dream's turn to say something, and looking at the way he started to move his hands wildly and speak fast like the end of the world was right around the corner, Sapnap knew that he had launched into one of his long-winded stories that were sometimes difficult to follow if one wasn't used to Dream's ever-changing train of thought.

Sapnap's eyes flew to George, whom he expected to look bored, but to his surprise and displeasure he saw that he was looking at Dream with attention, a small smile on his face like he found him endearing. When Dream finished his story, he laughed without reserve like it had been the funniest thing he had heard all day.

Sapnap wasn't used to anyone else but himself understanding and appreciating Dream's sense of humor that much, and he was already aggravated by it when he saw that George's cheeks were flushed. Maybe it was just from the alcohol and the stuffy atmosphere of the room but, somehow, Sapnap doubted it.

He wondered if Dream had noticed it too. Probably not, though, because he seemed to start another story, which George eagerly listened to as well.

After a while, just before dessert was served, there was finally a lull in their conversation, and George looked up from his plate. He let his eyes travel around the room slowly until they landed on Sapnap, who didn't even bother to hide that he'd been watching him the entire time. They stared at each other for longer than necessary, and it seemed to turn into a battle to see who would look away first. The music got muffled in Sapnap's ears, and it felt like the only thing that existed in that moment was the two dark pupils in the center of his vision.

Eventually, George was the one to lose—Dream started speaking again and he turned his attention back to him, breaking the moment into a thousand pieces. The din of the room rushed back to Sapnap's ears, almost making him flinch.

Somehow, this victory felt bitter to him, and left him with a strange sensation in the pit of his stomach.

“He’s not that bad,” was the first thing Dream said once they got back to the privacy of his chambers. The two of them had a habit of spending time there late at night, when everyone else was sound asleep. Sometimes, they played chess by the fire, but more often than not they just chatted away about their day and the future until one of them got too tired to keep his eyes open. It wasn’t rare for Sapnap to fall asleep on the booth seat under Dream’s window, a fact that they were both careful to conceal in case people heard of it and misinterpreted the situation.

“Really?” Sapnap asked, putting more logs into the fireplace and trying to revive the flames.

“Yes, he’s actually quite nice and funny, even,” Dream said.

Sapnap gave a non-committal hum.

“You don’t sound convinced,” Dream pointed out.

Sapnap got back up and took his usual seat on the right side of the fireplace.

“I just... It’s a good thing that he’s friendly and likable to you, I guess, but I would hate for it to make you forget the fact that you’re expected to marry him.”

“I know,” Dream sighed. “Believe me, there’s not a single chance that I’ll ever forget that. It was on my mind all evening while I was talking to him. I was telling myself that it could be way worse and that my parents could have picked an absolutely despicable person, but the thought of tying myself to him forever in this way still repulses me.”

“So then...?”

“Then I don’t know, Nick,” Dream winced. “All I’m saying is that under different circumstances, he and I might have been friends. As it is, though... It’s an inextricable situation, and I have no idea what to do, because if I reject him, then who knows who my parents will invite here next.”

Sapnap nodded, knowing that Dream was right. It didn’t matter that he might find George a bit arrogant, because at the end of the day the man still seemed respectful and kind enough, and he’d listened to Dream’s stories attentively, which probably made him the best possible option even though Sapnap hated to admit it.

“Sometimes, I wish I was noble enough that you could marry me instead of a stranger,” he muttered quietly.

Despite its impossibility, this idea was still something he allowed himself to think about at times, whenever the situation felt too dire, and he was pretty sure that it had crossed Dream's mind at least once.

Dream started smiling sadly. "I love you for saying this, but even if it was possible, I don't think I would do that."

"Why not?" Sapnap asked.

It seemed like a fail-safe plan to him. They'd known each other since they were children, and Dream trusted him with his life. Surely he knew that Sapnap would try his hardest to make their 'marriage' as bearable to him as possible? They wouldn't even have to change much about the way they currently acted around each other, except the fact that they'd have to share chambers, something that was already half the case anyway.

"You're not like me, Nick," Dream pointed out. "I know that you fall for people, and that you crave physical touch and everything that love is. Marrying me would mean depriving yourself of your future happiness with someone you'd actually be in love with. I wouldn't want you to sacrifice this for my sake."

Oh. Sapnap hadn't even thought about that, probably because, despite having been with his fair share of people, he'd never felt attached enough to someone to consider sharing his life with them.

"But I would do it gladly," he said. "I'd put my life on the line for you, Dream, that's my job."

There was a pause as Dream looked at him with a pained expression on his face.

"I know," he said eventually. "When I think about it, I hate it."

Sapnap knew that the remark wasn't directed at him but at their situation in general, and yet he couldn't help taking it to heart. The hurt must have been visible on his face, as Dream added in a gentle tone, "What I'm saying is that maybe you should be a bit more selfish, that's all. I'm more grateful for you than I can express, but sometimes I feel like you worry about me even more than I worry about myself."

Sapnap almost pointed out that it was his job again, but that wasn't even true. He worried because Dream was his only family, and the mere thought of his unhappiness made him feel queasy and like he'd failed his duty as a best friend.

He didn't reply anything, though, because it was useless. There was nothing he could say to convince Dream that his worrying was justified, and nothing Dream could say to convince him that it wasn't.

Dream was yawning anyway, clearly ready to go to bed after such an eventful day, so Sapnap pointed out that it was time for him to go back to his own chambers, and left the room after ruffling Dream's hair on his way out.

For safety reasons, his chambers were located right next to Dream's, but instead of going there he decided to take a stroll down the park first. He had spent the whole day inside, which was highly unusual for him, and he felt desperate for some fresh air that would hopefully help him clear out his spiraling thoughts a little.

Once outside the castle, he made his way down to the rose garden, which was by far his favorite part of the park, especially at this time of the year when the flowers were in bloom and perfumed the air with their subtle scent.

Some of his fellow knights made fun of him for liking something that they deemed feminine, but Sapnap didn't care. Roses were beautiful on top of being mighty, and he didn't understand why he should be ashamed for holding them in high regard.

When he opened the small gate that led into the walled garden where the roses were on display, he immediately spotted a shadow kneeling a few feet away. The moon was bright that night, shedding enough light over the place so that Sapnap was quickly able to see that the dark silhouette was none other than George who, startled by the creaking of the door, had turned around and was now watching Sapnap enter the garden with an unreadable look on his face.

Sapnap nodded in greeting, wondering if he should say something or just ignore him. In the end, his curiosity got the better out of him.

“What are you doing out here so late, My Lord?” he asked as he stepped closer.

“Just having a walk. I heard many compliments about this place, and I wanted to check it out for myself.”

“I understand,” Sapnap said, now coming to stand next to George. He looked down and saw that he was examining a blue rose, one of the rarest varieties kept in the garden. “With all due respect, though,” Sapnap added, “you shouldn't be out here on your own, especially in the middle of the night. It's not safe.”

George sent him an amused look. “I thought the castle's gates were fiercely guarded, and that your knights were the best in the Seven Realms?”

“They are,” Sapnap protested, his pride a little hurt even though he'd never admit to it. “But still, danger can come from anywhere.”

George raised an eyebrow. “Including from within the gates?”

The question, although uttered in an innocent enough tone, immediately made Sapnap be on his guard.

“If you're looking to learn about rumors and gossips, My Lord, you're knocking at the wrong door,” he said bluntly. “I deal in fight and protection, not political talks.”

“Right,” George said, finally standing up. For the first time, Sapnap noticed that he was slightly taller, but he didn’t have time to dwell on it because George added, “If it’s so dangerous here, would you be so kind as to protect me tonight, then, Sir Sapnap?”

Sapnap had no choice but to accept. Turning his back on George now would have been not only against protocol, but against his very duty as a knight, no matter what his personal feelings for George were. So he gave a sharp nod, and they started walking quietly down the alley, stopping every few feet so that George could lean down and smell the flowers. Sapnap couldn’t help staring at the way he delicately cupped each rose and brought it to his nose, as if it might break if he grasped it too tightly. Sapnap wanted to point out that roses weren’t that fragile and that it was what made them so interesting, but he didn’t, choosing to stay quiet instead of revealing his somewhat unusual fondness for them.

Just as they finished their tour of the garden and were on their way out, George was the one to break the silence. “You’re out here late as well.”

Sapnap nodded, not sure if George was just making a casual remark or expecting him to reply.

“Why?” George pushed.

“I was having a talk with His Royal Highness and needed some fresh air before retiring for the night,” he briefly explained.

George remained silent at that, so much so that Sapnap thought he was out of the woods and wouldn’t have to talk to him anymore. The back entrance to the castle was in sight now, they just had to walk up a wide expanse of lawn to get there, and then he’d be able to part with George and leave that strange encounter behind. It was counting without George’s inquisitiveness, though.

“Were you and the Prince talking about me?” he asked, panting a little as he tried to keep up with Sapnap’s quick strides up the slope.

“It was a private conversation,” Sapnap muttered.

“So you were, then,” George said in a triumphant tone. “Does he like me?”

Sapnap stopped walking and turned to face George. “I apologize, My Lord, but I’m loyal to His Royal Highness and it’s not my place to reveal his confessions, provided he’s even made them. So I’m afraid you’ll have to find out for yourself whether he likes you or not.”

George hummed, his signature smirk tugging at his lips. “A challenge, then. I don’t mind one. And at least I already know one thing.”

“Which is?” Sapnap asked. His tone was probably too sharp but he was starting to lose his patience, and George didn’t seem to mind being addressed so casually anyway.

“I don’t think you like me very much, Sir Sapnap,” he answered, chuckling like he didn’t care either way. (To be fair, he probably didn’t. Why would he?)

Sapnap thought of apologizing, but realized that it would amount to admitting the truth that he indeed didn't care for George.

“What gave you this idea?” he asked instead.

“And what gave *you* the idea that I’d confide my private reasoning to you?” George grinned.
“In any case, this is where we part, I believe. Goodnight, Sir.”

Caught off guard by this abrupt end to their conversation, Sapnap only had time to whisper “Goodnight, My Lord,” before George disappeared behind the door.

Hunger is the purest sin

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading so far!

Chapter title from [this Susanne Sundfør song](#)

The next day, a tournament was held in George's honor. George himself had declined to participate, which Sapnap wasn't surprised about as it was obvious that the man had never fought once in his life, but both Dream and Sapnap were competing. Tournaments were a pretty regular occurrence and were generally won by one of them, as they were without debate the best knights in the kingdom. Dream was particularly good at jousting while Sapnap favored close combat. Today's tournament would focus exclusively on sword fighting, though, something that they were both equally skilled at, so it was difficult to predict who might win.

As they were putting on their armors in the participants' tent, hearing the growing noise of the crowd gathering on the stands outside, Sapnap took the opportunity to recount to Dream his late night encounter with George.

"Do you think he can really be trusted?" he asked once he was done. The question had been keeping him up all night, which was admittedly not ideal right before the tournament.

Dream, who had been listening to him with a focused expression, frowned.

"Why couldn't he be?"

"Well, some of the questions he asked me made it seem like he was pretty interested in getting into the kingdom's business."

"Maybe he was just curious, it's not necessarily a bad thing," Dream shrugged. When he saw that Sapnap didn't look convinced, he added, "Look, my parents wouldn't have invited him, and especially wouldn't be contemplating marrying me off to him if he didn't come from a trustworthy family. Plus, what are you afraid of? He's clearly harmless."

"Physically, maybe, although he could actually be pretending to..."

"Nick," Dream interrupted him, sounding half-amused, half-concerned. "Are you even aware of how paranoid you're sounding right now?"

"Sorry," Sapnap muttered. He wouldn't mention these suspicions again, then, but it wouldn't keep him from watching George closely.

Dream kept looking at him with a worried expression, so Sapnap decided to change the subject.

“So, if we both end up competing against each other in the final fight, and if it turns out that I take the advantage... Should I let you win anyway?”

“What? Why would you do that?”

“Um, maybe because George is the guest of honor and this whole thing was clearly organized by the King and Queen so that you could impress him with your incredible skills?” Sapnap answered in a sarcastic tone, but it quickly became evident that Dream had *not* realized that.

“Oh,” he whispered, suddenly looking very young and almost fearful. Then, he seemed to pull himself together and, with resolve, he said, “No, absolutely not. If I lose, I lose. We’ve always fought each other fair and square, and it’s not about to change today.”

“Alright,” Sapnap grinned. “May the best man win, then.”

Unsurprisingly, they both did find themselves in the final.

Sapnap had had no problem eliminating each one of his previous opponents, despite his lack of sleep and the constant worry in his stomach that made him glance at George at regular intervals during his fights. The man didn’t display any suspicious behavior, though, except for the fact that he seemed more interested in the duels than Sapnap had expected him to be. A few times, Sapnap caught him wince or flinch at the way Sapnap managed to strike his opponent by surprise, something that gave him renewed motivation to show George that, if he indeed intended to hurt Dream in any way, he’d be faced with Sapnap’s blade and wouldn’t come out of it unharmed.

Not that Dream really needed Sapnap’s protection. He won each one of his duels easily as well, overtaking his opponents with his sharp mind and unconventional tactics, and although Sapnap had seen him fought countless times before, he somehow seemed be outdoing himself today.

Still, as Sapnap walked into the arena one last time and bowed to Dream before raising his sword and waiting for George to signal the start of the fight, he told himself that he had as much chance to win as Dream did. In general, when they went against each other, the outcome of the duel came down either to luck, or to who had the most stamina in that specific moment.

As soon as George lowered his hand, Sapnap pushed all his exhaustion away and stepped towards Dream, eager to try landing the first blow. Dream had anticipated it, though, and he easily blocked Sapnap’s attack before retaliating immediately. Sapnap managed to parry as well.

It went on like this for a very long time, and Sapnap quickly lost count of how many attacks and counter-attacks they each landed, and how many times they circled around the arena,

never losing sight of one another—or at least, Dream didn’t.

Sapnap, despite all his efforts to remain focused, still couldn’t help glancing at George from time to time, but it was fruitless because George still wasn’t doing anything particularly interesting. He was just watching the fight with an intense expression, his elbows resting on his knees like he wanted to be as close to the show as possible. Still, Sapnap’s eyes kept flying back to him against his will, and he was grateful that his helmet was hiding his distracted glances from both Dream and everyone else around.

In the end, as could have been expected, his distraction was his demise. He let his eyes linger on George for half a second longer than usual, a half second that made him too late in parrying one of Dream’s blows, which landed right on his wrist and made him drop his sword. It clattered to the ground and Dream pushed Sapnap down to the floor as well, crowding him and pressing his blade close to his neck.

“What was that again about letting me win earlier?” he whispered, and Sapnap couldn’t see his face, but knew that he was smirking.

“Shut up,” he muttered, furious against himself for having lost in such a stupid way, and furious at George for making him so inattentive.

“Do you surrender?” Dream asked, as was expected by the tournament’s rules.

If this had been one of their training sessions, Sapnap would have probably been trying to overturn their position and keep on fighting Dream with his bare hands if he had to, but this was a sword fighting tournament, and his weapon was now out of reach. On top of that, he was actually exhausted. Therefore he resigned himself to say, loud enough for everybody to hear him, “I surrender!”

The audience exploded in cheers for Dream, who took off his helmet and sent a grin towards the royal tribune, where George was clapping along with the rest of the crowd, an enigmatic smile on his face.

Dream extended his hand to help Sapnap get back up, and the two of them made their way over to the tribune, both bowing to the monarchs.

“Congratulations, my son,” the King said. “You fought brilliantly today.”

“Thank you, Father,” Dream said, sounding a little choked—words of praise from the King were a rare occurrence.

As Sapnap was busy removing his own helmet, he was surprised to hear George chime in. “Congratulations to you as well, Sir Sapnap. I have rarely seen a swordsman be so quick on their feet.”

Sapnap was so baffled that he didn’t even think to answer.

“Yes, yes,” the King said in a dismissive tone. “Dream, come up here so you can receive your prize.”

The trophy, which had been specially made for the tournament, was a shield beautifully decorated with gilded leaf patterns. George was the one to present it to Dream, who was kneeling before him as per tradition. For a second, Sapnap imagined himself in his place, but was quick to dismiss the thought. Dream had won their fight fairly, and Sapnap held no particular pride in victory anyway. Not to mention that he had no use for a pretty but unpractical shield. So, really, there was no reason for him to be jealous, and he definitely was *not*.

At the banquet that night, he watched once again as Dream and George spent the entire course of the meal talking and laughing together. Sapnap knew that them getting along so well should have made him happy, or at least relieved for Dream's sake, but he found it impossible to shake out the uneasiness that had been plaguing him ever since he had first laid eyes on George.

The problem was that, at this point, he was completely unable to tell if it was his own protective instincts acting up and making him biased against George, or if there was something genuinely shifty about the man, and Sapnap was somehow the only one to see it.

He was back in his room and undressing, having put water to heat over the fire and looking forward to relaxing his tense muscles in a warm bath, when there was a knock on the door, making him frown. He had said goodnight to Dream a few minutes before, and it was clear that Dream would be going to bed right away considering how he couldn't stop yawning himself.

"What is it?" Sapnap asked.

"There's a message for you, Sir," he heard a servant answer, and he opened the door to take the note from him.

The handwriting was messy and the ink a bit smudged like the person who had written the words was left-handed. Definitely not Dream, then. The contents themselves, although the note wasn't signed, made it pretty clear as to who the messenger was.

Going for a stroll again. Could I borrow your protection for tonight as well? If so, meet me at the back entrance.

Although it was formulated as a question, the request still sounded pretty much like an order. Sapnap knew that he didn't have to take commands from George, not yet anyway, but it still didn't cross his mind to refuse, despite his current exhaustion and need to unwind.

"Tell the Duke I'll be there in a few minutes," he said to the servant boy before closing the door.

As he quickly made himself presentable again, he told himself that he was just doing his duty. Any time spent with George was a good opportunity for him to try and gauge his personality and true intentions, so he'd just have to push his tiredness away and stay alert a bit longer that night.

When Sapnap joined him, George was nonchalantly leaning against the door. He had traded the embroidered shirt he had been wearing earlier for a much simpler white one that looked a lot like the one Sapnap had hastily put on before leaving his room.

They nodded in greeting and, when it seemed that George wouldn't be saying anything, Sapnap asked, "Where did you want to go, My Lord?"

"Back to the rose garden," George said, and he stepped outside without waiting for Sapnap.

They walked in complete silence until they reached their destination, George staying a few steps ahead so that Sapnap had a perfect view over his back and the fast pace he was keeping. He couldn't keep his eyes away, feeling almost hypnotized by the way George's shoulders moved under his shirt.

"Thank you for accepting to join me," George said, only breaking the silence once they were within the four walls of the garden. Sapnap wondered if this was intentional on his part.

"My pleasure," he answered, not really meaning a word of it, and sensing that George wasn't fooled either.

"You must be pretty tired after such a long day of fighting," he said in an absent tone after a minute, trailing his finger over the petals of a white rose.

"Not that much," Sapnap lied, not wanting George to realize that he had been going out of his way to grant his request. "I'm used to spending my days training, so..."

George hummed. "The Prince as well, I assume?"

"Yes. Less than me because he's also busy with councils, but he does train a lot."

"I figured," George said, clicking his tongue. "I always heard that he was a skilled swordsman, but for some reason I didn't expect him to be that good. I imagine that it makes your job easier."

"A little," Sapnap admitted. "It *is* a relief to know that he's more than capable of defending himself, but still, I wouldn't ever risk leaving his side. My life is much less valuable than his, and a lot of people would like him dead, so I always stay at the front-line."

"Of course," George whispered. Then, seemingly out of the blue, he asked, "What's your favorite rose here?"

Sapnap, who was used to Dream's tendency to switch from one topic to another seemingly without logic, took the question in stride and said, "I don't know, My Lord, they're all worthy of interest in their own way."

"But if you had to pick one?"

In truth, Sapnap already had his answer but he pretended to think about it for a moment. "Well, I guess I would probably pick the Black Velvet. It's that one over there," he eventually said, leading George to where his chosen variety was. It was a dark burgundy shade, some of its petals looking almost black.

"Why this one?"

Sapnap shrugged. "I just like its darkness."

"Very well," George said.

Without warning, he extended his hand towards Sapnap's right side. Out of pure reflex, Sapnap grasped George's wrist tightly to stop him and asked, "What do you think you're doing?"

Their eyes met, and George was looking annoyingly amused by Sapnap's knight instincts.

"Let me go, Sir Sapnap. I'm not going to hurt you, I promise. In fact, I'm sure that we can both agree that I'd be utterly unable of doing so."

Sapnap didn't know how true this actually was, but he still took the risk to release George, who smirked and reached out again. This time, Sapnap forced himself to stay very still, even as George's fingertips brushed against his hip and detached a dagger from his belt. Then, he knelt down and cut out the twig of a Black Velvet rose before getting up and holding it out for Sapnap to take.

"I... What?" Sapnap stuttered, feeling completely out of his depth.

"Where I'm from, it is tradition to give the loser of a tournament a prize as well," George explained. "I could tell that you liked roses yesterday, so..." He pushed the flower towards Sapnap, clearly expecting him to take it, but for some reason Sapnap couldn't bring himself to. Had George just admitted that he'd brought Sapnap here specifically so he could do this? If so, why? In any case, accepting to take the rose would have felt like betraying himself, or worse, betraying Dream. "Don't you want it?" George asked, and there was a hint of disappointment in his voice, but Sapnap told himself that he was imagining it, or that George was trying to manipulate him, which actually made a lot of sense now that he was thinking about it.

"You... You're not supposed to take out flowers from this garden, they're solely here to be on display," he said, scrambling to find a good enough reason to refuse.

"What's done is done, isn't it?" George argued, gesturing with the rose again and seemingly growing impatient.

"Why are you doing this?" Sapnap blurted out.

"I told you, it's tradition."

"No," Sapnap shook his head. "Your compliment earlier at the tribune, and now this... I think you're trying to get in my good graces, aren't you? You'd probably like me to put in a good

word for you with Dream, but I'm sorry, My Lord, it's not going to happen. I'll let him decide for himself what to think of you."

George looked at him attentively, like he was trying to figure out something, but Sapnap wasn't sure what it might be. In the moonlight, George's skin seemed somehow even paler than during the day, making him look like a ghost-like figure in his white garments.

"Fine," he eventually said, and Sapnap thought that this meant he was giving in, but instead he took a few steps forward, coming to stand close enough that Sapnap was now able to see the tiny freckles adorning his cheekbones. He had to keep himself from flinching as George lifted his hand and stuck the rose in his buttonhole, then put the dagger back where it belonged.

The sensation of his touch through his clothes was only fleeting, but Sapnap still felt like his skin was burning from it.

He stayed frozen in place as George turned his back to him and started to walk away.

"Let's go back," he called over his shoulder, and Sapnap finally got a hold of himself and followed him out of the garden.

Back in his room, he dropped the rose in a drinking glass then filled in his bathtub with the water he had been heating up earlier. He felt strange, almost dizzy, and immersing himself in scalding water didn't help him shake it out. Sighing, he leaned his head back against the tub and tried to relax and empty his mind.

It turned out to be impossible, though. As soon as he closed his eyes, his brain started to be filled with flashes of moments that had happened over the past few days: George's dark eyes fixed on him at dinner the first night, the inflection of his voice when he had praised Sapnap in front of the whole court at the tournament, the lilt of his laugh whenever he was chatting with Dream, the way his fingertips had brushed against Sapnap's nipple earlier, only for a fraction of second but enough to...

With a jolt, Sapnap realized that he was growing hard. He opened his eyes back up, desperate to find something harmless to focus on, but they landed on the rose, and he found himself transfixed by its contrasting colors, and by the heady scent that was now emanating from it. Without thinking, he sneaked his hand down and started to touch himself, shivering despite the hot water surrounding him, and his own panting sounding muffled, almost as if it belonged to someone else. As the pleasure rushed through his body in waves that were getting more and more intense, his eyes remained fixed on the rose. It was George that he was thinking of, though, George he was seeing in the middle of the petals and, eventually, George that brought him to climax.

When he woke up from a restless night, the first thing he did was throw the rose in the fire. As he watched it slowly fall apart and turn to ashes, he prayed that this was the end of

whatever had happened to him the night before, which had been merely a fluke and a moment of weakness on his part, something that he wouldn't even allow himself to think about anymore.

But it was counting without George.

He and Dream were planning to spend some time alone over picnic by the river that day. But, of course, Dream was never truly alone, as Sapnap was supposed to stay by his side whenever he was out of the castle's grounds.

Sapnap wasn't particularly looking forward to this outing, and could tell that Dream was quite anxious about it himself, albeit for vastly different reasons. Indeed, with each day that passed and every moment that George proved to be an acceptable suitor to his parents, the threat of marriage became increasingly real.

This was probably why, as they got to the stables where George was waiting for them, Dream only greeted him with a nervous smile, then quickly walked away to saddle his horse himself, leaving Sapnap and George alone.

Sapnap, who could feel the embarrassment closing in, was about to follow Dream when George said, "You're not wearing it."

Sapnap snapped his eyes towards him. "Wearing what, My Lord?"

"The rose," George said in a tone that made it sound obvious. He gave Sapnap a perceptive look like he knew exactly what he had been up to the night before, like he'd seen him sneak back outside in the darkness to get rid of his bath water, like he'd been by his side as Sapnap had watched the water mixed with his release disappear down the drain, a pool of shame settling in his stomach.

"It died," he shrugged, because any other answer would have been incriminating.

George raised an eyebrow. "Already? Didn't you put it in water when you got back to your chambers?"

The mere mention of water was enough to make Sapnap blush and he quickly turned away from George, hoping he hadn't had time to see it. "I think His Royal Highness is ready to leave," he said, and he went to find comfort with his own horse, trying to tame the fast beating of his heart and internally cursing George for having come into their lives to mess everything up.

Blank stares and empty threats

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading so far!!

The journey down to the river went off without a hitch. Sapnap let Dream and George ride a few paces ahead of him, half listening to Dream's awkward (and somehow successful) attempts at jokes, and half checking their surroundings for potential threats. There was no one around, though. It was quite a chilly day, and they had taken an early start.

Once they made it to their destination, he and Dream worked in silence to set up the picnic on the grass while George watched them, perched on a rock at the river's edge.

"It's a bit cold, how about we made a fire?" he suggested once they were done.

"That's a good idea," Dream said.

"Great," George grinned. "Sir Sapnap, maybe you could go get some wood, then?"

It was a clear attempt at driving Sapnap away in order to have Dream all to himself. Sapnap would have scoffed at how obvious it sounded if it wasn't for how tense he'd been feeling all morning.

"I'm not leaving His Royal Highness alone," he said in a sharper tone than intended.

"Oh come on," George rolled his eyes, jumping off from the rock and joining them by the picnic blanket. "I'm not going to do anything to him in your absence, I'm just cold."

"I'm not leaving unless Dream asks me to," Sapnap replied, standing his ground.

George raised an eyebrow and turned towards Dream, clearly expecting him to agree with him and ask Sapnap to step away. Dream didn't say anything, though, just looked at Sapnap with panicked eyes that seemed to plead him *not* to go.

There was a long stretch of silence, then George started chuckling. "I see," he said. "I'm so stupid, I should have realized right away that there was something going on between you two."

"Excuse me?" Sapnap blurted out.

"It's obvious, isn't it? You're constantly by his side, you call him by his first name, you look at him like he's... I don't know, the sun or something, and yesterday you fought with him like you were deeply intimate with his body."

It didn't escape Sapnap that George was directing all of these accusations at *him*, and he didn't know what to make of it. By his side, Dream was growing paler by the second.

"Maybe I'm wrong, though," George continued, not leaving either of them a chance to interject. "Maybe you're *not* bedding His Royal Highness but, clearly, you're dying to. It would explain a lot, in fact, including why you won't leave us alone for five minutes, and why you've been looking at me like you want to rip my eyes out ever since I arrived."

"Enough!" Dream finally intervened, which was probably lucky for George because Sapnap was honest to God about to draw his sword. Dream took a step towards George and, in a low, almost menacing voice, told him, "Sir Sapnap is my closest friend and the future godfather of my children, if I am to have them. I am not asking you to like him, but if we are to be betrothed, I *would* ask you to treat him with all the respect he is due, instead of addressing him like an inferior as you are doing now. And regarding your question, let me put your mind at rest. I am not bedding *anyone*."

"I apologize, Your Royal Highness," George said, sounding more baffled at Dream's sudden switch of tone than angered by it.

Sapnap could tell that George didn't grasp the full implications of Dream's last statement, but it was probably for the best. It was still doubtful—at best—whether George was trustworthy, and if Dream had told him the truth right now, who could tell how he would have reacted?

"Good," Dream said, his voice already softening—he wasn't one to stay upset for very long. "Now *I'm* the one who's going to get wood."

"Wai—" Sapnap started to protest, but Dream cut him off.

"I'll shout if I need you. Now you two behave and try not to murder each other while I'm gone."

When they were left alone, the silence was almost unbearable, making Sapnap's thoughts even louder than they already were. George was staring at him intently, as if expecting him to say something, but Sapnap had no idea what he could even begin to tell him.

So, after another minute, George sighed and strode back towards the river bank where he knelt to the ground, seemingly looking for something.

Sapnap watched him from afar until his curiosity got the better of him—which was starting to be a recurring problem around George.

"What are you doing?" he asked as he joined him.

"Looking for skipping stones," George muttered in response, not bothering to look up. "Ah, this one should do the trick."

He picked up a stone and, with a practiced gesture, threw it far into the water. It made a perfect arch until ricocheting over the surface one, two, three times before sinking into the river.

The sight made Sapnap's competitive instincts kick in. "I can do better."

"Can you?" George smirked. "Show me, then."

So Sapnap looked around for a suitable stone and, once he found one, didn't waste any time before throwing it. He hadn't done this in years, and was delighted to see the stone bounce not three, not four, but five times.

He turned to George and couldn't help laughing when he saw his disgruntled expression. To his surprise, though, George eventually started laughing as well. Suddenly, Sapnap realized that he was tired of being on his guard around him, and that maybe it was time to try and ease the tension between them, come what may.

"Dream and I used to come here and do exactly this when we were children," he told him once they both calmed down, then quietly added, "I am not in love with him, or whatever it was that you were implying earlier. I'm merely protective of him because I see him as my brother. Do you understand?"

"Yes," George said, although it seemed to pain him to admit it.

"And do you believe me?"

"Does it matter to you if I do?"

"It matters because I don't want you going around and spreading false rumors about Dream and me."

"Only because of that?"

"I... yes," Sapnap said, unsure of what George was trying to get at.

"Very well," George said in a pinched tone. "I believe you, then, and I promise I won't be spreading any rumors. Who do you take me for, anyway? Have you got such a low opinion of me that you think I would do that?"

"I don't know, it's just..."

George cut him off. "You seem to think that I don't really care about the Prince, but I do, alright? Maybe not as much as you care about him *yet*, but I have no desire to hurt him or his reputation, because I think he's a good person. I am not faking anything here. Now, do *you* believe me when I say that?"

The thing was, maybe Sapnap was starting to. He couldn't tell if George was in love with Dream, but it did seem that he genuinely liked him. So, maybe Sapnap had indeed been unnecessarily paranoid about him this whole time, and maybe he needed to cut him some slack.

"Alright, I believe you," he said. "But if you do anything to betray my trust..."

"Yeah, yeah," George rolled his eyes. "I'll be meeting your blade or whatever."

Sapnap was about to concur but was interrupted by Dream, who dropped a pile of wood on the ground and said, "Oh good, you're both still alive. What are you up to?"

"I'm teaching the Duke how to skip stones," Sapnap said, sending a teasing grin to George who gave him an offended look.

"Actually, I don't need any teaching. You were lucky earlier, but I can easily beat you."

"Alright, prove it then."

As George bent down to find another stone, Sapnap cast a glance at Dream, who was looking at them with a pensive expression.

"Everything alright?" Sapnap whispered to him once he joined them on the river bank.

"Yes, I'm just surprised to see you two suddenly get along," he whispered back.

Sapnap didn't understand. Him and George were clearly *not* getting along, considering all the bickering they were doing. "What do you mean?" he asked, but Dream just patted his shoulder in answer before starting to look for stones as well.

Soon, the three of them launched into a vicious competition full of arguments, cheating attempts and sabotaging tricks, and it was somehow the best time that Sapnap had had in months. It warmed his heart to hear Dream laugh so unabashedly and act his age for once. As for George... well, Sapnap had to admit that he was pretty fun to be around, apart from the times where their hands or arms brushed on accident, and Sapnap was reminded of what had happened in the bathtub the night before, and of the guilt he was harboring because of it.

He hadn't told Dream about it, of course, and in fact he hadn't even told him about his second meeting with George in the garden. He wasn't sure why exactly, as nothing truly incriminating had happened *then*, but the more he thought about it the less he wanted Dream to know. He had a feeling that it would only serve to make things even more complicated than they already were, and since George hadn't mentioned a word of it either, then Sapnap was satisfied with the idea of keeping it to himself.

By the time they decided to ride back to the castle, they had all switched to first name basis, and the sun was already starting its descent. The day had flown by, and Sapnap was reminded that the whole purpose of their outing, which was for Dream and George to spend time one-on-one, hadn't been achieved on account of his own presence. George hadn't suggested that Sapnap should step away again, though, and Sapnap wondered why.

Over the next few days, the three of them continued to go on outings during the day, Dream and George roping Sapnap into messing around with them as soon as they were out of the castle's grounds and Sapnap could stop pretending that he was only there as a silent protector. It was the most fun Sapnap had had in years, and he realized that he and Dream had grown bored and boring lately. George's presence was therefore a welcome addition, even though he still had a tendency to get on Sapnap's nerves, especially since he had apparently decided that

one of his favorite activities was to tease Sapnap until Sapnap lost his calm and had to go cool down somewhere.

Without ever discussing it explicitly, he and George kept meeting for walks after dinner as well. In the end, Sapnap had decided to tell Dream about it but Dream had hardly reacted, simply sending Sapnap unreadable looks whenever he left his chambers to go join George at the back entrance.

During those moments in the dark, George was much softer than in the light of day—it was like all his abrasiveness disappeared down the horizon along with the sun. He quietly talked to Sapnap about his life back home, or the books he was reading, or the travels he wanted to go on, and Sapnap listened to him, enraptured by his voice and almost proud that George had chosen to confide in him.

He wasn't sure he understood why, but assumed that it was because George thought him to be an inconsequential listener. At the end of the day, they were strangers and destined to remain so, and maybe this was why George deemed him safer than Dream, who he might soon be officially attached to.

When he was in his presence, Sapnap tried his best to forget about his desire for George, but all of his resolve faded away the moment he found himself alone in his chambers. He wondered if it would ever stop plaguing him, but suspected that, as long as George stayed around, he would be condemned to crave his touch, and condemned to hide this craving.

One morning, Dream was called for a private meeting with the Queen and he disappeared into the council chamber, leaving Sapnap and George on their own.

Without Dream's presence to act as a buffer, Sapnap had no idea how to act around George in the light of day. Thanks to their evening walks, the two had definitely grown friendlier, but it somehow made the situation more complex, not less, because now Sapnap had to deal with the fact that he was not only attracted to George's fine features, but also didn't find his personality that irritating after all—at least, when he wasn't on a mission to mock Sapnap over something ridiculous yet enraging.

"I, er... I think I'm going to go read in my chambers," George said, breaking the awkward silence.

Sapnap nodded and started to walk away, but George stopped him with a hand on his forearm, which he removed as soon as Sapnap turned back to him.

Sapnap wished George hadn't done that, so that it wouldn't have to be added to the list of things he'd be thinking about in the privacy of his room later that night.

"If I were to go for a stroll instead, though, would you join me?" George asked.

The proposition seemed dangerous. They had never spent alone time in broad daylight, and Sapnap wasn't sure how people might interpret it when they inevitably saw the two of them

walk side by side in the park. This was why he said, “You do realize that you could ask Dream to accompany you on these walks instead, right? I’m sure he’ll be done soon.”

“Does it bother you that I’m asking *you*?” George asked, narrowing his eyes.

Sapnap evaded the question. “I just... I just think that it would be a good opportunity for you to get to know him better, wouldn’t it? You two have hardly spent any time alone.”

George opened his mouth then closed it again, as if changing his mind about what he was about to say. He took a few more seconds then answered, “You’re right. I guess I’ll ask him, then. Thank you.”

And he was the one to walk away without another word.

As Sapnap watched his silhouette get smaller down the hallway, he asked himself, not for the first time, what was really going on, and why he felt like they were all on the edge of disaster.

As soon as Dream’s meeting with the Queen was done, he went to find Sapnap in the armory where Sapnap was cleaning his sword. He quickly interrupted his task when he saw how upset Dream looked.

“She wanted to know how things are going with George,” Dream said without preamble.

“And what did you tell her?”

“The truth, which is that he and I get along, and that I like him well enough. I probably shouldn’t have said that, though, because she told me that, if I indeed like him, then there was no reason for me not to propose to him. She expects me to do it tomorrow.”

Sapnap almost dropped his sword to the floor.

“What?”

“Yes,” Dream sighed. “That’s when I tried to explain to her how I felt about marriage again, but she wouldn’t hear anything, as always. I even told her that if this was about having an heir, I didn’t see why I couldn’t raise a child on my own, but she seemed to think that it was a laughable idea. She said it’s important for me to have a consort, because that’s what the people expect and want. I think the real reason is because of that political alliance with George’s family, though.”

“But you wouldn’t necessarily have to marry him to forge a strong alliance,” Sapnap pointed out.

“Maybe not, but I guess marriage bonds are still the safest way to ensure that both parties stay faithful and committed.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“I don’t know,” Dream winced. “There’s nothing I can say that would make them stop pressuring me. And as we already talked about, if I turn down George they’ll just find someone else. So I can’t help thinking that… well, maybe marrying George wouldn’t be that awful after all.”

He looked over at Sapnap with pleading eyes, clearly expecting him to say something and offer some sound piece of advice. Deep down, there was a part of Sapnap that wanted to beg him not to go through with it, but he was terrified of further exploring why the idea of the two of them being married made him that miserable.

Therefore, he forced himself to look at the situation with a neutral perspective and, after a few seconds of silence, he said, “You and George do get along, and even I can admit that he’s… well, he seems pretty reasonable. I still don’t know if you should risk it, though. If you propose and he says yes, then surely he’s going to have expectations as to what your marriage entails, and you don’t know how he’ll react when it turns out that these expectations aren’t met.”

“That’s true. There’s only thing I can do, then,” Dream said in a resolute tone.

“What?” Sapnap asked, half-hoping that Dream would say that he had to turn George down.

But instead, he said, “He does seem pretty reasonable, so maybe all I have to do is tell him the whole truth, and ask him if he’d be willing to marry me anyway.”

Then, right on cue, there was a knock on the door, and George peeked his head in.

“There you are,” he said upon spotting Dream, then sent a quick look to Sapnap. “I hope I’m not interrupting anything.”

“Not at all,” Dream smiled, gesturing for him to come in.

“I just wanted to ask you if you’d like to take a stroll with me, either now or after dinner,” George said, staying in the doorway and casting a nervous glance at Sapnap like he was afraid of his reaction, before focusing back on Dream.

“After dinner would be perfect!” Dream exclaimed, and his cheerful tone sounded painfully fake to Sapnap’s ears but he didn’t think that George was able to tell.

“Great. I’ll see you in a bit, then?”

“Yes, can’t wait!” Dream answered, still grinning like a madman.

As soon as George closed the door, his smile dropped and he slumped into Sapnap’s chest without warning. Thankfully, Sapnap’s reaction time was swift enough that he almost automatically wrapped his arms around Dream to hold him upright.

They stayed quiet for a few minutes, Sapnap running his hand over Dream’s back in what he hoped was a soothing gesture.

“I’m going to have to talk to him tonight, don’t I?” Dream whispered. “This way, if he doesn’t want to go through with the engagement, he’ll have time to leave before the public proposal tomorrow, and avoid a scandal.”

“Yes, I guess you’re right,” Sapnap sighed even though he hated to even think about it. “Do you want me to come with you?”

“Thank you, but no. You’ve done more than enough already, and I can handle it. I’ll come see you afterwards though, if that’s alright.”

“Of course,” Sapnap said, squeezing Dream one last time before letting him go. “Whatever happens, I’m sure it’s all going to be fine,” he added.

Somehow, it was as much for his own benefit as it was for Dream’s.

Dinner was frustrating, to say the least. George was trying to make conversation with Dream the way they usually would, but Sapnap could tell that Dream’s mind was elsewhere, most definitely busy preparing himself for the confession to come. Sapnap wished he could go and sit by his side to distract him, but he wasn’t allowed to join the royal table.

After a while, George seemed to notice that something was off with Dream and he stopped talking. His eyes met Sapnap’s just like they had that first night, but his expression wasn’t daring, just confused and maybe even a bit sad.

Sapnap wondered how he would react once he learned the truth about Dream. Was it possible that George was fonder of Dream than he had let on so far? And if so, would the news that Dream would never be able to reciprocate his feelings crush him?

The questions swirled into Sapnap’s mind as he had dinner on his own in his chambers, then waited for Dream to join him, pacing back and forth in front of his window while the sun was slowly setting. He shouldn’t have cared that much about George’s reaction, he knew. What really mattered was whether he would keep Dream’s confession a secret, which Sapnap was almost confident that he would. Beyond that... well, what George might be feeling about it wasn’t really any of Sapnap’s business, was it?

Finally, he heard a knock on his door, and Dream came into the room, looking a little worn-out.

“How did it go?” Sapnap couldn’t help pressing while Dream took a seat.

“Not too bad. I tried my best to explain how I felt to him, and he seemed to understand.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“And what did he say?”

“Well, he’s in a pretty similar situation as mine,” Dream explained. “His father forced him to come here and it’s all about politics to his family too. But he told me that he’d always hoped to marry someone he loved. Which, thankfully, isn’t how he feels about me, so at least I didn’t have to let him down on that front.”

“Oh,” Sapnap whispered, unsure how to feel about this revelation. If George genuinely didn’t have his eye on Dream, and never had, then Sapnap didn’t know how to explain some of the ways George had acted towards himself, especially after the tournament. He had assumed that George’s interest in him had merely been a way to get closer to Dream, but now... Now it was just confusing.

Dream started talking again, and Sapnap focused back on the conversation at play. “He knows that if he doesn’t get engaged to me, his father will just find him someone else as well. So I told him that, if we were to get married, he would be free to be with other people if he wished, on the condition that he couldn’t be public about it. And, maybe down the line, once our parents are gone, we can break off the marriage and he would be free to be with someone properly.”

“So... what is he going to do?”

“He said he needed to think about it, but that if he settled on no, then he’d be gone by the morning.”

“You might not see him again, then.”

“Yes. We might not,” Dream said, and the correction didn’t escape Sapnap but he chose to ignore it.

That night, Sapnap hardly managed to sleep, but this time it wasn’t because his mind was plagued with thoughts that felt forbidden. Somehow the events of the past few hours had finally pushed those thoughts away, but they had been replaced by a constant worry over what George’s decision would be.

The thing was, he knew that George choosing to stay and say yes to Dream was probably the best possible option for the two of them. Maybe things would be a little awkward between them at first, but they would probably end up figuring out a way to make their marriage seem real to outsiders, and be as easy as possible to one other. Still, there was a part of Sapnap that hated the idea of them being married, probably because he hated the idea of *Dream* being married against his will. So maybe the other option was actually better but, when he thought about George leaving without another word, Sapnap could feel his stomach sinking.

In short, neither option seemed satisfying, and he just wished that the sun would rise already, so that he could find out what George had decided.

Sham

Chapter Notes

Welcome back!

Just a quick update to say that I'm almost done writing this fic, and I'm planning on 7 chapters instead of the 6 initially announced — wooo

Dream was called for an impromptu council meeting in the early morning, and Sapnap decided to kill time by joining the royal guard's daily training. As he made his way out of the castle, he was tempted to make a detour to George's chambers to see if he was still there, but it wasn't any of his business, he reminded himself. And in any case, he'd find out soon enough.

As he stepped onto the training field, he switched to his knight headspace and lost himself in the familiar movements, finding pleasure in the strain of his muscles and the clinging of the swords all around him. Fighting was the one thing he had been brought up to do, the one thing he was absolutely confident in, the one thing he'd always have for himself. In that moment, it brought him a somewhat bittersweet feeling of comfort.

He was so focused that he didn't immediately notice that someone had come to sit on the sidelines and was now watching the guards train. It was only when Sapnap was done with his current duel and came back to the world around him that he saw him.

"I'm taking a break," he told the others, wiping the sweat off his face with a shaky hand before heading towards the spectator—George. He watched Sapnap get closer with a blank expression on his face, and Sapnap started to doubt himself. Maybe George had no intention to talk to him, but had simply come here because he was bored and wanted to watch the practice. Well, it was too late now to turn back.

He nodded to George in greeting, and George nodded back. "You're still here," Sapnap pointed out somewhat uselessly.

"I am."

"Does it mean you're going to say yes to Dream?"

"I think so."

"I see."

George gestured at him to sit by his side.

“You don’t seem particularly enthusiastic,” he pointed out in a quiet voice once Sapnap was settled, his heart beating fast but not because of the fight he just had. Sapnap was about to protest, but George added, “Do you still not trust me enough to treat him right?”

“It’s not that,” Sapnap said. It was strange how quickly his opinion of George had shifted from almost hate to now... Well, he wasn’t sure exactly, but he did know that George would treat Dream with all the respect he deserved should they get married.

“Does it surprise you, then?” George asked. “The fact that I’m thinking of saying yes, despite what Dream revealed to me?”

No, Sapnap wasn’t exactly surprised, but spotting George a minute ago had still sent a shock to his system, and he was currently trying to recover from it. His heartbeat didn’t show any signs of slowing down.

“Not really,” he answered. “From what I understand, this arrangement would be as beneficial for you as it would be for Dream.”

“Yes, that’s exactly why I’m considering going through with it,” George answered in a pensive voice, then he turned to face Sapnap and added, biting his lip, “Unless there’s something I don’t know about, some other reason why I shouldn’t say yes?”

Sapnap met his eyes back, which felt like a mistake. His throat suddenly felt dry. “What other reason could there be?”

“I don’t know, Sapnap.”

Hearing George call him by his name was strange, as a lot of time he either didn’t address him by name, or called him Sir Sapnap when he was trying to mess with him. ‘Sapnap’ made it seem like they were close, and Sapnap sternly reminded himself that they weren’t, not really. Maybe once George was married to Dream, they would become something akin to friends, but it was far from being the case in that moment, despite all the walks they had taken and quiet talks they’d had—those had been inconsequential, he *knew* that.

“If you’re thinking of some other secret that Dream might have been keeping from you, then no, there’s nothing,” he said, trying to remain focused on their conversation. “From what he told me, he was completely honest with you last night about himself and his intentions.”

“But there’s nothing else? When he asks me the question later today, you think I should say yes?”

As he spoke, George leaned towards him just a little, but enough for Sapnap to now be able to feel his breath tickling his face. He wanted to close his eyes and get lost in the sensation, but instead all he could think about was Dream kneeling in front of George and holding out a ring to him.

He forced an answer out of his mouth. “You have all the information you need to make your decision. Beyond that... I’m no one to tell you what to do.”

There was a flash of something on George's face, but before Sapnap could attempt to decipher what it was, it had already disappeared.

"Very well," he said, turning his head away from Sapnap to look back at the other knights. Sapnap took it as his cue to leave.

He could feel George's eyes bore into his back for the remainder of the session.

The proposal was a very public affair.

In the afternoon, the entire court gathered under the oldest oak tree in the park under the pretext of a tea party. It was clear that everyone already knew what was truly going on, though. The ladies were wearing dresses in the colors of Dream and George's respective families, and the tables were decorated with love-themed ornaments.

Knowing that this 'party' had been organized by Dream's parents when they knew very well that Dream wasn't in love, and the hypocrisy of the entire thing, almost made Sapnap sick, but Dream himself didn't look shaken. It felt like he had accepted his fate, and a cold resolve was now painted on his face as he greeted the guests one by one. Sapnap stayed close by throughout, on the edge of committing treason when the King and Queen approached their son and told him that they were proud of him.

Sapnap knew for a fact that they had never said these words to him before, even when Dream had led his men to victory in battles, or had suggested improvements within the realm that ended up making the royal family more popular with their subjects. Today, Dream hadn't done anything commendable like this, all he had done was to follow their direct orders, which would result in the thing he least desired in the world—tying himself to someone for what would probably be the rest of his life.

Sapnap was seething, but he couldn't do anything.

Then, George arrived. He was wearing a shirt that was beautifully embroidered with flower patterns. They looked suspiciously like roses, but Sapnap chose to believe that it was a coincidence.

George bowed to Dream much more solemnly than he had over the previous days. When he looked up, his eyes met Sapnap's for a split second before focusing back on Dream, who visibly swallowed and said, "Lovely to see you, My Lord."

"You as well, Your Royal Highness."

They both sounded like they were about to faint from the nerves, and Sapnap would have found it hilarious if it wasn't for the fact that there was nothing funny about the situation. Maybe one day, when everything was hopefully sorted out, he'd be able to laugh about it, but for now he just wanted this moment to be over and done with.

Dream must have been feeling that way as well because, completely out of the blue, he awkwardly dropped on one knee and held out a ring, making some of the more romantically-inclined onlookers gasp with delight.

Sapnap knew that Dream had spent the past few hours preparing a speech for this moment. In fact, he had even asked Sapnap to help him with it but, for once in his life, Sapnap had refused to help him, claiming that he was feeling worn out from his training session and needed to take a nap. In reality, the idea of sitting down with Dream and coming up with words to praise George and declare his undying love to him felt impossible, almost dangerous. Dream had looked disappointed by his refusal, but thankfully hadn't pushed the issue.

Now though, Sapnap was starting to regret his decision because it soon became clear that Dream's 'declaration' was lacking feeling.

"I have immensely enjoyed having the opportunity to make your acquaintance over the past few days, My Lord," he started. "I appreciate your wit, intelligence and earnestness. You are truly everything that one can be looking for in a spouse"

Sapnap shot a glance at George, who looked a little amused by Dream's almost mechanical proposal. But it wasn't George who needed to be convinced, it was all the spectators who had no idea that this was all just some kind of sham that had been orchestrated solely for their benefit.

As discreetly as possible, Sapnap cleared his throat, hoping that Dream would get the message. He interrupted himself for a few seconds, frowning a little, then seemed to steel himself before carrying on, "I have been constantly thinking about you ever since the day you arrived. In fact, it feels like you have bewitched me, My Lord, and this is why I have no choice but to kneel down before you today and ask you if you would do me the honor of becoming my husband."

Sapnap could hear some of the members of the court swoon, and he sighed in relief. The mission was half accomplished, now it was George's turn to play his part.

All eyes were on him, but he seemed not to notice them, focusing exclusively on Dream.

"Thank you, Your Royal Highness," he said in a quiet voice as if it was just the two of them under the tree. It made his words more intimate and believable, and Sapnap wondered if this was a deliberate strategy of his. "I do not know if I deserve all your lovely compliments, but I do know that you deserve to be praised just as much, or even more. I am deeply impressed by how good and kind you are, and all the moments we have spent together have proved to me that coming here was a true blessing. I feel as bewitched by you as you feel by me. So yes, of course I would be beyond happy to marry you."

The court immediately launched into applause as Dream slipped the ring on George's finger, both of their hands shaking slightly. They exchanged nervous smiles, and George gestured at Dream to get back up, which he slowly did.

Then, everything went so fast that Sapnap didn't have time to really process it. One moment the pair was face to face, still smiling but in a way that seemed painfully fake to Sapnap, and the next Dream was leaning towards George and pressing his lips against his. The kiss didn't last long, just a handful of seconds while the applause got twice as loud, but it felt like an eternity to Sapnap, whose eyes were glued on the point of contact between the two.

He was feeling for Dream, who he knew was currently going against all his instincts and was probably desperate to end this and go smash something in his room in frustration. But there was something else at play within Sapnap as he watched his best friend kiss his now fiance. He didn't recognize it at first, but then Dream and George pulled away, and his eyes met the familiar pair of brown irises again, as if they were magnets that he couldn't help being attracted to. They jolted him into a realization.

He was jealous of Dream for getting to feel George's lips under his, and wished it could have been him instead.

And, considering the way George was currently looking at Sapnap, his eyes clinging on to his almost desperately, Sapnap started to wonder whether he might be feeling the same way.

Going through the rest of the tea party was an ordeal. All the guests came to the new 'couple' one by one to congratulate them warmly and wish them the best. As the afternoon went on, Dream's thank you's became increasingly lackluster while George's smile turned into a wince. It was a wonder no one seemed to notice it, but Sapnap supposed that people were too entranced by the idea of love and of an upcoming royal wedding to care about reality.

Eventually, it was Sapnap's turn to face Dream and George and offer his best wishes to them. He first spoke to Dream, saying "Congratulations, Your Royal Highness" in the most cheerful tone he could manage. Dream hugged him tightly in response. It took Sapnap by surprise, as they were generally careful not to be physically affectionate with each other in public in order to avoid unfounded rumors. Now that Dream was officially engaged, though, Sapnap guessed that no one would bat a lash at this, especially since it was common knowledge that they were childhood friends.

Maybe this would turn out to be one of the rare redeeming qualities of this marriage, Sapnap told himself as he next faced George.

His throat became immediately dry and his body was buzzing, desperate to reach out and touch him even though he knew very well that this was impossible, not only now but *ever*. George was engaged to Dream now, and it didn't matter that this engagement was only real on paper—for all of their sakes, Sapnap couldn't and wouldn't do anything that could sabotage their marriage.

"Congratulations," he said, unable to bring himself to address George by his title even though this was what protocol demanded.

"Thank you," George said, sounding choked, and if Sapnap had any lingering doubts about George sharing his desire for him, these doubts vanished when George gestured at him to get

closer and quietly added, "I'll be going for a stroll after dinner."

The boldness of the statement, made under such public circumstances, had Sapnap's blood freeze in his veins. He shot a panicked glance at Dream, who was thankfully too busy conversing with the next guest in line to have noticed or heard anything.

Still, Sapnap didn't understand how George could have taken such a risk, and he looked at him disapprovingly before bowing his head and walking away, evading an answer.

All through the rest of the afternoon and then dinner, he told himself that he wouldn't take George's bait and wouldn't meet with him once again in the garden. In fact, from now on, he'd be careful to stay away from him as much as possible.

Ever since that evening where he had a moment of weakness, Sapnap had tried to push his desire away as much as he could. But now, with what had happened today, every action and word that George had had towards him started to make a lot more sense. The rose, the compliments, the stares, the quiet confessions in the dark... They hadn't been power plays, attempts at manipulating him, or just meaningless actions like he had thought all along. No, it seemed that they were all genuine marks of interest, and now it was Sapnap's responsibility to ignore them, or even better, to put a stop to them.

This was why he suddenly changed his mind. If he wanted to set things right, the easiest way to do it would be to meet with George one last time and tell him that whatever had been going on between them needed to stop.

Therefore, he slipped out of his room after dinner and quietly walked down to their usual rendezvous point by the back entrance.

If George was surprised to see him, he didn't show it. Putting his hands in his pockets, he started walking away as soon as Sapnap had joined him, and they made their way down to the rose garden in complete silence.

The evening was darker than the previous times they had met, the moon and stars clouded over like it was going to rain—fall had truly started now.

Sapnap yearned to go back to the beginning of the summer, before Dream's birthday, back when they had no idea how much their lives would be changed within the course of a few weeks. Sapnap would have done anything for things to have stayed the same eternally, even if that meant that he would have never met George.

At least, this was what he liked to tell himself. Deep down, though, he wasn't sure he actually meant it.

They entered the rose garden, still not speaking, and Sapnap closed the gate behind him. It made a creaking sound that made his skin crawl with nerves.

This evening, George's attention was not directed to the flowers. No, he was staring right at Sapnap almost defiantly, as if expecting him to do something—Sapnap could only imagine what, although on second thought he'd rather *not* imagine it for fear of losing all self-control.

"Did you come here with Dream yesterday evening?" he asked, grasping at straws to pretend that they were just here to have a normal conversation.

"No, we went to see the kitchen garden," George answered, indulging him for now.

"Oh. Did you like it?"

"I did, but not as much as I like coming here." There was a pregnant pause, and the more seconds passed, the more it became obvious that George had chosen his words very deliberately. "You know," he added, his voice now quieter, "Dream told me that I'd be free to be with other people if I wanted, as long as I'm being discreet."

Although Sapnap had seen it coming, George's statement still took his breath away.

"What are you saying?" he asked, trying not to show how affected he was by what George had just implied.

"There is no need to act coy, you *know* what I'm saying."

George walked up to him and Sapnap stepped backwards until he could feel the wooden gate under his back, George now effectively trapping him even though they weren't touching. It felt like it was just a matter of seconds until they were, though, and he suddenly remembered about the resolution he had taken just moments ago.

"Stop this," he said, shaking his head.

"I'm not doing anything," George answered, but it was a lie, because he was now hovering even closer to Sapnap, his hand grazing his hip.

"It's your engagement night, you shouldn't even be here with me," Sapnap managed to utter.

George smirked at that.

"I shouldn't be here with you? What about *you*? Why did you accept to come, if you find it so scandalous?"

"I..."

He interrupted himself when George's hand closed the small remaining gap, his fingers now digging into his flesh through his shirt. He suppressed a shiver, but it was useless because George was now bringing his face closer to him, and for a terrifying, thrilling second, Sapnap thought he was about to kiss him. But instead, he whispered, "Admit it, Sapnap. There's something here, between us, and it's been here from the start. I know you feel it too."

It took everything in Sapnap's power to avert his eyes from George's lips. He could deny everything one more time, he supposed, but he had a feeling that it would be useless. His

body and entire demeanor were currently betraying him, and even if this hadn't been the case, the very fact that he was here with George spoke volumes. He suddenly realized that maybe this had been George's intent all along, that this meeting had been a test he had orchestrated in order to confirm his suspicions. If so, it was a test that Sapnap had failed quite spectacularly.

Therefore, there was no denying it anymore, but even so, Sapnap could still try and do the right thing like he had promised himself.

He reached out and took George's wrist between his fingers, removing his hand from his hip and dropping it with regret.

"It would be wrong to do this," he said, the argument an admission in itself.

"Would it? Like I said, Dream told me I was free."

"Maybe, but he's my best friend. It would be strange and disrespectful to do anything without his explicit consent, even if he gave you a blanket permission."

"Just go talk to him, then," George suggested like it was the easiest thing in the world.

Sapnap tried to imagine himself go up to Dream's chambers and ask him whether he would be alright with Sapnap bedding his fiance. The very thought of that conversation made Sapnap cringe.

"I couldn't possibly..."

"Why not?" George cut him off. "Do you think he'd refuse? Or do you think he'd be jealous?"

"No," Sapnap said. In fact, he doubted that Dream would really care, although he might be hurt by the fact that Sapnap had been keeping his desire for George a secret the entire time. "It would just be a complicated and embarrassing conversation, I guess," he tried to explain.

George nodded, and they fell into silence for a moment. "Look, it's your choice" he eventually said, "I won't force you into anything, obviously. If you change your mind, you know where to find me."

And with that, he skirted around Sapnap and left the garden.

Sapnap didn't try going after him, too afraid of succumbing to temptation and ending up following George back to his chambers. Instead, he looked up at the starless sky, trying to tame the rabbit-like pulsations of his heart.

Touch my mouth and hold my tongue

Chapter Notes

Chapter title from [this Mumford & Sons song](#)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He tried to ignore it. For days, he did his best to pretend that the conversation had never happened, that he hadn't found out that George wanted him, that his own desire was not worthy of acknowledgment or worry, and definitely not worthy of disturbing the fragile balance that Dream had managed to find in response to his predicament.

But Sapnap had to spend his waking hours in Dream and George's presence, had to witness them act like there was a spark, had to see them hold hands or look at each other lovingly whenever they were in public, and it hurt on more than one account.

He pushed that hurt down, though. If he showed it too conspicuously, he was afraid that George might come to him and try something again, and this time Sapnap wasn't sure that he would have enough resolve to say no. So he did everything in his power to act like he wasn't affected in the slightest by George and Dream's fabricated marks of affection. Sometimes, he caught George watching him with hawk eyes as if defying him to say or do something, but Sapnap just looked away and put all of his focus on his work.

It was another story when he got back to the privacy of his chambers, though. There, his frustration grew tenfold, and he lost hours of sleep replaying everything in his head over and over again, which generally devolved into clinging on to the times where George had been close enough to touch. This in turn ended up with his eyes closed tight and his hand down his pants, the act bringing him satisfaction only for a moment before frustration took over again.

Eventually, things took a turn not because of George, but Dream.

"What's going on with you?" he asked one evening as they were both lazing by the fireplace, Dream looking over some reports while Sapnap was trying (and failing) to get through a chapter of a military history book.

"What do you mean?" he frowned.

"You haven't turned a page for the last ten minutes, so something is clearly on your mind. In fact, you've seemed distracted for days now."

"Have I?" Sapnap tried, but Dream wasn't fooled by his light tone and raised an eyebrow at him. Sapnap let out a sigh. "It's nothing."

"I don't think it's nothing."

“Alright, it’s *something*, but it’s very stupid.”

“I don’t care if it’s stupid. If something is weighing on you I want to know what it is, even if you don’t think it’s worth mentioning.”

Growing nervous, Sapnap started biting his lip. He knew that Dream wasn’t going to drop the issue, especially now that Sapnap had foolishly admitted that there was indeed one to begin with.

Therefore, it seemed like he had no choice but to tell him the truth, unless he somehow managed to find a plausible lie within the next ten seconds. Sapnap wasn’t exactly a good liar, though, and he already felt bad enough for keeping secrets from his best friend for so long.

This was why he took one big breath to steel himself, then started, “You know how you told George that he’d be free to… er, meet with other people even if you’re married?”

“Yes…?” Dream frowned, clearly not understanding what Sapnap was trying to get at.

“What if… What if it was me?” Sapnap muttered under his breath, praying that Dream wouldn’t ask him to repeat it.

Looking at the way Dream widened his eyes, though, he had heard him loud and clear.

“You and George? You’ve been…?”

“No,” Sapnap cut him off, blushing. “We haven’t done *anything*, I promise, we just… talked about it.”

“I didn’t realize there was something going on between the two of you,” Dream said, still sounding shocked. “I mean, I know you’ve been spending time with him, but I assumed you were doing it for my sake, trying to gather information in secret or something. I thought you could barely stand him?”

“That’s what I thought too, at first,” Sapnap chuckled, feeling a bit like a madman. “But then, I don’t know how or why it happened, I just… started to feel differently about him.”

“And you say that you two talked about it? Does that mean he feels the same way?”

Sapnap cleared his throat. “He’s um… Well, he’s made it pretty clear that he wants me too.”

“I see,” Dream nodded. The surprise was finally starting to fade from his face, and he grew more thoughtful. “So you want me to break off the engagement, is that it?”

“What? No, not at all,” Sapnap said, shaking his head wildly.

“But if you love each other, then surely…?”

“Who said anything about love? This isn’t about that, it’s just… physical,” Sapnap argued. “So if you really meant what you said to George about being with other people, there’s no

need to change your plans.”

“Are you sure, Nick?” Dream asked. “Are you sure you’re not in love with him? You can tell me, I promise I wouldn’t be mad.”

“I know. But I’m not in love with him.”

Dream stared at him for a long time, clearly trying to assess whether Sapnap was telling the truth.

Sapnap himself didn’t even know if he was or not. What he felt for George was murky and complicated, and in that moment it was overshadowed by the strength of his physical desire, as well as the weight of the situation.

Eventually, Dream must have seen something on his face that reassured him as to Sapnap’s intentions, because he said, “Alright. If you’re sure about it, then I won’t do anything to change our plans. As for you and George, well… It’s not really up to me to tell you what to do. You’re both adults, and I don’t want either of you to feel like you owe me anything.” He paused for a moment, then added, “Just do me a favor. If your feelings for him shift even in the slightest, please tell me about it. There’s still time to call off the wedding if needed.”

“Thanks,” Sapnap whispered. “It won’t be necessary, though.”

Dream gave him a half-believing look and they fell into silence. After a moment, Dream turned back to his report while Sapnap was fidgeting with his book, wondering what to do now that he had gotten this conversation out of the way.

It felt unreal that it had even happened, considering how much he had avoided even thinking about the George issue over the previous days. But now, somehow, he had managed to do exactly what George had suggested the last time they had talked, namely obtain Dream’s consent to pursue some kind of affair with him.

It didn’t mean that Sapnap *had* to go through with it, though. He could just ignore what Dream had said and continue keeping George at a distance, and George would never had to know.

When he got into his chambers later that night and looked over at his empty bed, though, the mere idea of pleasuring himself one more time even though the man he wanted was waiting for him only a few corridors away seemed not only ridiculous but unnecessarily cruel to both George and himself.

So, in the end, he hastily put on a darker shirt so as not to be spotted by stray guards in the hallways, and set off towards George’s chambers.

A few minutes later, as he was facing George’s door, he was overcome with doubt once again.

It had been days since their last talk in the garden. What if he had taken too long to make a decision and George had changed his mind?

And if not, what if he was making a terrible mistake?

In any case, he knew he needed to do something, because the longer he was standing there, the more he ran into the risk of someone seeing him.

Just as he was telling himself this, he could hear footsteps in the distance. They sounded like they were getting closer so, without further thinking about it, he knocked on the door, praying that George wasn't already asleep and dead to the world.

Thankfully, after just a few seconds, the door was pulled slightly ajar and George's head appeared in the gap. He raised an eyebrow upon seeing Sapnap and, without talking, waved him in and locked the door behind him.

The only source of light in the room was a single candle on the desk, but Sapnap wasn't really aware of his surroundings. All he could see was George standing in front of him with his shirt half unbuttoned like he was getting ready to go to bed, and his face half hidden by moving shadows.

"Sorry if this is a bad time," Sapnap said on reflex, even though he knew how ridiculous it would sound once he made his intentions clear—if he even managed to.

"Why are you here?" George asked, his tone a bit cold, which made sense considering the way Sapnap had given him the cold shoulder over the previous days.

"I, um... I talked to Dream, like you suggested."

"You did? What did he say?" George sounded careful like he was afraid that Sapnap had come here to reject him once and for all.

Sapnap supposed it was still within the realm of possibilities, but the more he looked at George the less inclined he was to end things before they had even truly started.

"He said that we were free to do what we liked," he breathed out, deciding to gloss over the rest of the conversation. George didn't need to know that Dream had offered to call off the engagement—it would only make things more complicated, and Sapnap had made the solemn promise to himself not to ruin his and Dream's arrangement.

George let himself smile for half a second, then took a step forward and quietly asked, "And what would *you* like to do, Sir Sapnap?"

As he reached out and rested his palm in the center of his chest, Sapnap found himself unable to answer. It didn't matter, though, because George increased the pressure until he was grabbing the fabric of Sapnap shirt and pushing him towards an armchair, on which Sapnap dropped down a little heavily.

He felt breathless already, just from that brief contact, and it looked like it wouldn't get better any time soon because George started undoing the rest of his own shirt's buttons, staring right

at Sapnap, who hungrily roamed his eyes across George's chest once it was exposed.

George smirked and dropped his shirt to the floor. "Have you done this with anyone else before?" he asked.

Sapnap nodded.

"Tell me," George demanded, and Sapnap complied, even though talking was the last thing he wanted in that moment.

"The last time was with another guard, a few months ago," he started. George climbed on his lap and Sapnap's brain froze for a moment, but George lightly put his hands over his shoulders and nodded at him to continue. "He er... He had just been promoted and was about to be dispatched far away. He needed to blow off some steam beforehand, I suppose."

"So you helped him out?"

"Y- yes."

"How generous of you," George smirked. "Who else?"

He shifted on Sapnap's lap in a way that might have seemed innocent if it wasn't for the fact that their crotches were now pressed together in a way that couldn't be a coincidence. Sapnap had to force himself to speak instead of running the tip of tongue across George's clavicle to find out what the thin skin there tasted like.

"My first time was with a girl from the kitchen. It was a complete disaster though, and I haven't dared set a foot down there since then."

George hummed, his fingers now playing with the top button of Sapnap's shirt but not quite unfastening it yet. If he didn't do it soon, Sapnap was not above begging for it. "And what was your best time?" he asked quietly.

By that point, Sapnap had lost all inhibition so he had no qualms in admitting, "I'm not sure I've had a best time. Yet."

"Yet," George repeated, and he finally popped Sapnap's button open, immediately leaning down to press his lips to his neck.

Sapnap's breath hitched, and he could feel himself already growing hard even though they were just getting started. As George continued mouthing at his neck, Sapnap reached out to touch his hair, grasping at it slightly because he couldn't help it. George grunted in response so Sapnap tightened his grip, and now he could feel George getting hard as well.

Suddenly detaching his lips from Sapnap's neck, George looked at him, his cheeks beautifully flushed.

"Have you got any idea of the effect you have on me?" he asked, sounding as out of breath as Sapnap was. "I've been wanting to do this ever since I first laid eyes on you."

The admission, although not that surprising anymore, still made Sapnap's heart beat that much faster.

"I could say the same thing."

"Really?"

"Maybe not from the first moment, but the night you gave me the rose, once I got back to my chambers, I... I touched myself. Couldn't help it. I could hear myself being loud, but I couldn't control it, it was like the sounds came from someone else."

He had no idea what was getting into him, why he was even telling George all of this when he would surely die of embarrassment once he thought back on it in the light of day. George didn't laugh, though. In fact, he looked fascinated.

"What were you thinking about?" he whispered right into Sapnap's ear, his lips grazing against it and sending shivers down Sapnap's spine.

"You," he breathed out. "You touching me, and..."

"And what?"

"You inside me," he said, blushing and hiding his face in the crook of George's neck. He thought distantly that he smelled sweet and flowery before George took his face between his hands and made him look back at him.

"Is that what you want?" he asked, sounding more serious than Sapnap had ever heard him be.

"Maybe, just... not now, please," Sapnap answered because, despite how much he had obsessed over that thought lately, he didn't feel ready for it.

"Of course." George said, and they fell into silence, just staring at each other's eyes in the warm glow of the candle. There was a bittersweetness to the moment that Sapnap wasn't sure how to explain. Maybe George had sensed it too, because he added, as if to get them back on track, "You know, I've also been loud and thinking about you. A lot."

"What- what did you think about?"

"This. You and me. What it would be like to feel you, hear you, finally make you let down your guard around me and take you apart entirely."

Sapnap swallowed, George's words involuntarily making him buck up his hips. The sudden friction made the two of them gasp, which brought a light chuckle to George's lips.

"I'd like that," Sapnap told him timidly, and George nodded.

"I've got you," he said, and he started to unfasten the rest of Sapnap's buttons, leaving the weight of the moment behind.

Sapnap woke up with a start just as the first rays of sun were starting to slither through the windows. The ceiling didn't look the same shade of gray as usual and the blankets felt softer against his skin, but it was only once he heard the soft sound of breathing by his side that he finally got his bearings.

Everything that had happened the night before came back to him in a vivid rush of visions and sensations. He couldn't allow himself to dwell on it at the moment, though, because dawn meant that every servant in the castle was currently getting ready for the day, and soon enough they'd be walking the hallways and knocking on people's doors to offer breakfast.

Sapnap had to get out of there before he was caught, so he left George's bed and put his clothes back on as swiftly and silently as possible. Not quite silently enough, though, because George started to shift and slowly opened his eyes.

He looked at Sapnap for a moment, not seeming the least bit confused at finding him there, then said, his voice scratchy from sleep, "You're leaving?"

"I have to go back to my chambers before someone finds me here," Sapnap said, but George frowned, not seeming to be satisfied by that explanation, or like he didn't grasp how truly serious the consequences would be if anyone was to find out about what they had done. He *had* to understand, though, so this was why Sapnap added, in a colder tone than what he might have liked, "It was foolish and reckless of me to come here last night. If someone had seen me go into your room, it would have been a disaster."

At those words, George sat up on the bed, not bothering to cover his now exposed torso, and asked, "Are you saying you don't want to do this anymore?"

Sapnap couldn't help trailing his eyes over George's shoulders, able to finally see in the light of day the spots where he had run his tongue the night before. "I don't know..." he answered. "I'm just saying that this is a risky thing to do. If people were to find out about it, you would be sent back home, I would lose my job and position at the court, and Dream would become the laughing stock of everybody, even if he tried to convince people that he had known all along and was alright with it."

"Right. So you don't want to do this anymore?" George repeated, making Sapnap sigh.

It looked like he wouldn't be able to get away with it. "Of course I want to do it again."

"Me too, so that's settled then," George said, lying back down like the conversation was over and they had figured out everything they needed to figure out.

Sapnap needed a plan, though—maybe it was his knight's instincts speaking, or maybe he was just more rational than George.

He thought for a minute, then said, "Let's keep on going for strolls after dinner. I think at this point it's common knowledge that we do, and people won't start suspecting anything if

Dream himself is publicly aware of us spending time together, and doesn't seem to have an issue with it."

"Smart," George answered, sounding like he was on the verge of going back to sleep.

Sapnap rolled his eyes. It seemed like, no matter what happened, George would keep annoying him just a little bit with his nonchalant attitude to life. Deep down, though, Sapnap feared that this annoyance was slowly but surely turning into fondness.

"See you later, George," he whispered, but George didn't answer, sound asleep again.

One might have expected Dream to avoid talking about certain issues considering how uncomfortable they made him when they related to himself but, in fact, it was the complete opposite.

When he and Sapnap found each other alone on the training field later that day, the first thing he asked was, "So... How was it?"

"How was what?" Sapnap asked, playing dumb.

Dream snorted and lifted up his sword, waiting for Sapnap to make the first move. "You and George," he specified.

Sapnap, who was about to strike, lowered his hand. If Dream was really determined to talk about *this*, then he'd rather they did it with a clear mind rather than while waving weapons at one another.

"How do you even know that we..."

"Oh come on," Dream cut him off. "He couldn't stop staring at you during lunch."

"That's not true."

"It is."

Sapnap blushed. Maybe Dream did have a point. And maybe Sapnap himself had had a hard time keeping his eyes away from George's face, wondering how long it would be until he got to touch his skin again. "Do you think anyone noticed?" he asked sheepishly.

"No, don't worry. Everyone is obsessed with the wedding, they wouldn't notice anything even if you two started kissing in the middle of the throne room. And speaking of kissing... How was it?"

"We didn't kiss," Sapnap muttered, pretending to suddenly be very interested in a spot that was tarnishing his blade because he knew that Dream was going to keep pushing for details he wasn't really eager to share.

"Wait, you didn't?"

“I told you it’s not like that. Kissing would be like we were in love or something.”

“Right… But doing everything else is fine?”

Sapnap shrugged. He knew how stupid and illogical it sounded, but somehow it still made sense to him. Kissing George would have felt too intimate, like crossing a dangerous line that could only lead to confusion at best, and desperation at worst. Plus, George hadn’t tried kissing him either, so it seemed that they were both on the same page with it.

“What did you do, if you didn’t kiss?”

Sapnap could feel himself turn even redder. “Do you really need to know?” he whined.

“You usually don’t have an issue telling me about these things,” Dream pointed out.

“Yes, but it’s different this time.”

“How is it different?”

“Because we’re talking about your fiance, Dream,” Sapnap said, getting a little aggravated. “Please don’t ask me to share details, I already feel strange enough about it as it is.”

Dream held up his hands. “Alright, alright, I’m sorry. I just wanted to make sure that you had fun.”

“I did,” Sapnap admitted quietly.

“So you’ll be doing it again?”

“Yes. Unless you think we shouldn’t?”

Dream shook his head. “I meant it when I said that you could do whatever you wanted. As long as you don’t get caught.”

“We won’t, I’ll make sure of it,” Sapnap promised, and they left it at that, raising up their swords to finally start training.

Chapter End Notes

Please excuse my awkward attempts at writing smut (adjacent) scenes ☺

I’m *almost* done with this fic so the last two chapters should be posted within the next few days.

Fuel to fire

Chapter Notes

Chapter title from [this Agnes Obel song](#)

Over the next few weeks, Sapnap found himself watching George live a double life.

During the light of day, he stayed by Dream's side as much as possible, looking the perfect picture of the infatuated fiance and irreproachable Prince Consort to be. At least, Sapnap knew that his smiles were genuine and that he laughed at Dream's puns and jokes because he did find them funny. The two had become somewhat close friends and seemed determined to keep the charade going while supporting each other—they had probably talked about what they could do to make their relationship seem real without crossing each other's boundaries, although Sapnap didn't know the details.

Despite this state of things, Sapnap still had mixed feelings about seeing Dream hold George's hand when they were on a walk, or sit by his side at every meal. Even though he knew that it was necessary and didn't mean anything, especially since *he* was the one who got to touch George all he liked every night, he also couldn't help but feel bitter about the fact that he would always have to keep it a secret to the rest of the world.

And he felt guilty about it in turn because, even if he had mapped almost every inch of George's skin with his tongue or fingers by now, George didn't belong to him either, and Sapnap couldn't afford to forget about it. What they were was just this: two bodies colliding time and time again in the stuffy air of an abandoned glasshouse, only daring to be soft with each other in the heat of the moment, then putting their clothes back on in dead silence.

In fact, it had become difficult to talk to George ever since they had started doing... whatever it was they were doing. Not that it had been that easy to talk to him before, but it was now an almost impossible task, as he answered all of Sapnap's questions or comments in monosyllables and grunts, and seemed to be actively avoiding his eyes the moment they were done. The time when he quietly talked about his dreams and interests seemed like a distant mirage, to the point where Sapnap started to wonder if George even wanted to still be around him, let alone keep going with their little arrangement. He did show up at the back entrance every evening without mistake, though, and he also didn't strike Sapnap as the type of person who would keep doing something just to please someone else.

Still, one night as they were making their way back to the castle in silence, George lagging a little behind as usual, Sapnap suddenly decided that he had to make sure that they were both on the same page. He turned back to face George and asked, "Do you want to keep going?"

“What do you mean?” George muttered, walking past him with his shoulder barely brushing against Sapnap’s.

“I mean that we don’t have to keep doing this, you know, if you don’t want to,” Sapnap called after him.

George finally stopped in his tracks, but didn’t turn back as he said, “Why wouldn’t I want to?”

“It’s just that as soon as we’re finished, you barely acknowledge me,” Sapnap tried to explain.

“Well, what am I supposed to do? Should I call you pet names, hold your hand, and tell you how lovely you were? Is that what you want, Sapnap?”

Sapnap couldn’t help blushing at George’s suggestions, but told himself that it was only because of how preposterous they were. “Obviously not, I know we don’t feel that way about each other,” he said, and the sentence made his heart tighten in his chest even though it was nothing but the *truth*. “It just seems like you’re somewhere else, sometimes. Like you’re detached or something... Even while we’re doing it.”

“It sounds like *you* might be the one who wants to stop, then, since I’m apparently not up to your standards,” George said in a bitter tone.

“What? That’s not what I said,” Sapnap protested, but George started walking away. Sapnap jogged after him, joining him just as they were reaching the door. “Come on, don’t be like this,” he pleaded in a whisper. “I didn’t mean to offend you, and I don’t want us to stop.”

“Whatever. I’ll see you tomorrow,” George mumbled, and he disappeared down the dark hallway.

The next evening, for the first time in weeks, George wasn’t at their usual rendezvous point after dinner. Sapnap waited for him for a while, telling himself that maybe something had come up that was making George late, but deep down he already knew that he wouldn’t show up.

In fact, George had been acting antagonistic towards Sapnap all day, and not in a teasing way like he usually would. No, he had been unnecessarily cruel, criticizing every single thing that Sapnap had said or done, to the point that Dream himself, who usually laughed at his antics, had seemed surprised, sending Sapnap worried looks all afternoon. Sapnap had decided to be the bigger man and ignore George’s comments, or at least delude himself into thinking that there wasn’t anything unusual about them, but now, faced with the fact that George wouldn’t be joining him tonight, he had no choice but to accept that something was wrong, and that it probably had to do with their short conversation (or fight?) the night before.

He started walking back to his chambers, wondering if he should go and confront George about it, or give him some space and hope that things would go back to ‘normal’ the next day.

In the end, he was too curious, or maybe simply too addicted to George to let it slide even for one night, and he found himself knocking on his door before he even knew it.

“What do you want?” George asked coldly as he waved him in. He didn’t bother to lock his door this time, which could only mean that he didn’t expect or want Sapnap to be staying long.

“You weren’t here at the door,” Sapnap said. “I waited for you, but you didn’t come.”

“And?”

Sapnap sighed. “And did I do something wrong? I told you I was sorry last night, I just...”

“No you didn’t,” George cut him off.

“What?”

“You didn’t say you were sorry.”

“Well, I *am* sorry. But in my defense, you’re the one who misinterpreted my words and got offended over nothing.”

“It wasn’t *nothing*, Sapnap,” George scoffed.

“Alright. Tell me, then. What was it?”

“If you need me to spell it out for you, then I don’t think it’s even worth telling you.”

“Sometimes you hardly make any sense, George.”

“I don’t care. Now go, please. I’m tired.”

Sapnap thought of pleading for him to give him a proper explanation, and thought of apologizing again even though he still didn’t understand, but knew that either of these options would be useless, because George was nothing if not the most stubborn person he’d ever met.

“Just tell me one thing,” he said, walking up to George and pushing his face as close as possible to his without actually touching him. “Are we done?”

George visibly swallowed and, after a moment of silence, he whispered, “Well, the wedding is next week so maybe we should actually stop this. I mean, it’s not like it was going to last forever anyway, right?”

Sapnap’s heart sank in his stomach. With everything that had been happening, he had somehow managed to forget that the ceremony was coming up so soon. He hadn’t even considered the possibility that it might change things for him and George but, apparently, *George* had, and according to him they couldn’t continue sleeping with each other past the wedding.

“I guess you’re right,” Sapnap said, his throat as dry as the desert, and regretting it as soon as the words left his mouth.

What else could he do, though? It wasn’t like he could beg for George to keep him as a lover. Plus, George was right: it had been naive of Sapnap to think that their ‘arrangement’ could go on forever.

George nodded and, to Sapnap’s surprise, reached his hand up to cradle Sapnap’s jaw delicately. “Can I kiss you? Just once for the road?” he asked in a timid voice.

Sapnap knew that saying yes would be a mistake, but the word left his mouth anyway—it was useless to pretend that he hadn’t been craving George’s lips for weeks, if not months, even though he knew that finally getting them would only end up hurting him.

And it did. The moment was over before it even truly started, George’s mouth pressing against Sapnap for a split second, hardly long enough for Sapnap’s brain to register the sensation, then George was taking a step back like he was eager to put some proper distance between them.

It’s not enough, Sapnap wanted to scream. *You can’t give me half of something and expect me to be satisfied with it.*

He kept that desperate plea to himself, of course.

George’s face had now turned unreadable, and when he whispered, “Goodbye, now,” Sapnap could tell that this was it, that George was closing the door on him and on them for good.

As he walked back to his chambers, Sapnap repeated to himself that it was probably for the best. At least now, he could stop spending his nights worrying about getting caught. And now, he was free to be with someone properly, although the very thought of it made his insides shrink.

He went to bed with a heavy heart, trying to determine when exactly things had shifted for the worse, but falling asleep before he could settle on an answer.

Over the next few days, George seemed to be ignoring Sapnap. Maybe it was due to the fact that his father had just arrived to attend the wedding ceremony and he was spending most of his time with him, but even in moments where they were in the same room, Sapnap could tell that George was carefully avoiding to even look at him, let alone talk to him.

It got to a point where Dream asked Sapnap what was going on, and Sapnap gave him a brief explanation, telling Dream that he was fine when asked how he was feeling about things being over with George. He expected Dream to keep pushing for more details, but maybe sometime over the course of this affair Sapnap had become a master liar, because Dream just accepted what he was telling him and dropped the subject pretty quickly.

Sapnap suspected that Dream's reaction might have also been due to the fact he was too anxious about the upcoming wedding to really care or think about anything else. These suspicions were confirmed when, two days before the ceremony, Dream came to find him in his chambers early one morning. He silently slipped into Sapnap's bed and snuggled against him, and it took Sapnap's sleepy brain a second to register that Dream was crying. Once it finally clicked, he wrapped his arms around his friend and stroke his back slowly, attempting to whisper soothing words in his ear even though he felt a little like crying himself. He managed to keep the tears within the confines of his eyes, though, and after a few minutes Dream started to calm down, his sniffles getting few and far between.

Once they completely stopped, Sapnap quietly suggested, "Maybe we could do something fun today, just the two of us like old times?"

"We can't," Dream replied with a pout, his voice scratchy. "George and I are supposed to take his father hunting, remember?"

"Oh," Sapnap said, his heart sinking when he realized that he would be expected to accompany the party, which meant facing George and his cold avoidant looks for hours on end. Sapnap almost wanted to pretend that he was too sick or busy with something else to join, but he also wouldn't have forgiven himself for abandoning Dream that day, especially after the meltdown he'd just had. So he said, "Well, I'll be with you all along. And if you feel like you need some alone time at any point, just tell me and I'll create a diversion or something."

"Thanks, Nick," Dream said, sending him a smile that was much too small and not at all convincing.

They laid together in silence for a few more minutes, then heard servants start to walk down the hallway and left the bed's warmth with regret.

Sapnap hated George's father perhaps even more than he hated Dream's parents. He acted rudely towards Dream, making no effort to get to know him as a person, and clearly only caring about his title and the prestige he could bring to their family. In fact, he hardly seemed to care about George himself, only addressing him to criticize him over meaningless details like his posture or the way he held his horse's reins. And it went without saying that he didn't bother acknowledging Sapnap once, even when Dream introduced him as his personal guard and close friend.

Sapnap seethed in his saddle as they made their way through the forest, doing his best to keep himself from snapping at the man whenever he gave George a harsh remark. Sapnap tried to send sympathetic glances his way but George still seemed set on ignoring him, his face staying carefully blank under his father's attacks, probably because he was accustomed to them and too proud to show that they had any effect on him. For the first time, Sapnap caught himself thinking that maybe this marriage would be a true blessing after all, if it meant that George was kept away from that awful man.

The journey to the spot where he and Dream usually hunted seemed to be taking forever, as George's father kept making them stop every few minutes, complaining that something was stuck in one of the hooves of his horse even though Sapnap checked every time and couldn't find anything.

"I've never met such an incompetent servant," George's father said after stopping in a clearing for what must have been the fifth time, not even bothering to lower his voice.

Sapnap's hand was tingling with the urge to punch the man but of course he affected not to have heard anything, not wanting to cause a scandal.

To his surprise, George suddenly spoke for the first time since they had left the castle. "He's not a servant but a knight, Father."

His eyes were fiery as he said this, the atmosphere somehow growing ten times tenser—one could have heard a pin drop. In fact, on top of the rush of blood to his ears at having George finally acknowledge him in such a way, Sapnap thought he could hear some faint rustling down in the trees. He was probably imagining it, though, as it was a beautiful day with no wind whatsoever.

George's father opened his mouth, about to reply something that would be no doubt be humiliating for Sapnap, but George beat him to it. "In any case, if this bothers you so much, why don't you take my horse and I'll take yours?"

"Very well," his father said in a pinched tone, and George started to dismount his horse.

Just as he was doing so, the sounds that Sapnap thought he had been hearing got unmistakably louder, and three people suddenly stormed into the clearing. Half of their faces were covered with a piece of fabric—bandits, clearly, or maybe even abductors who knew that capturing one of the people of the party would mean obtaining a hefty ransom in return. They had probably been following them for a while, but Sapnap had failed to notice them.

"Fuck," he muttered, drawing out his sword.

Without thinking, he immediately leaped towards George, who one of the attackers had just reached and was swinging his sword at while George seemed frozen in place, unable to react. Sapnap managed to slither himself between him and the assailant and started to parry his blows.

"Get back on your horse and stay back," he shouted to George, who finally snapped out of his daze and followed Sapnap's instructions. Sapnap noticed that George's shoulder was injured, blood starting to stain his white shirt, but he pushed the thought and worry away to focus on the fight at hand.

Luckily, the bandit wasn't a very skilled swordsman and Sapnap made quick work of disarming him and knocking him down. When he turned around, he saw that Dream was fighting the two other assailants by himself and flew to his rescue. They swiftly got rid of them, one of them overtaken by Dream while the other suddenly dropped his sword and fled the scene without further ado.

Sapnap slowly lowered his sword, his chest heaving. It took him a minute to realize that all eyes were on him—George’s father was sending him a glare full of contempt like he entirely blamed him for the situation (which, to be fair, was a little justified) while his son was looking at him with an expression that Sapnap couldn’t interpret at the moment. Luckily, his injury didn’t seem to be that serious, but Sapnap still winced at the sight of blood, and it took everything in his power not to go fuss over George’s shoulder and cover the red stain with a piece of fabric from his own shirt.

To keep himself from doing so, he turned towards Dream, who was also staring at him with... anger? His expression quickly shifted back to a neutral one, though, and then he averted his eyes.

Once the moment of shock had passed, Dream went to George and asked him if he was alright, George saying that he was fine and already wasn’t bleeding anymore. Sapnap let out a small sigh of relief.

As they started to make back to the castle in complete silence, he was left wondering what he might have done to deserve Dream’s anger.

The only potential explanation he could think of was that he had gone to defend George first rather than Dream. Ordinarily this wasn’t what he would have done, of course, since his duty was to the Prince first and foremost, but in these particular circumstances it had been obvious that George had been the one most at risk, as he was unarmed and not mounting his horse at the time of the attack. On top of that, it was only a matter of days until George became Prince Consort, and Sapnap doubted it would have gone over well if he had been more seriously injured, let alone abducted or killed, especially right in front of his father’s eyes.

Therefore, Sapnap didn’t really understand why Dream would be upset at him for rescuing George first. He wouldn’t be able to ask him until they were alone later that day, though.

As soon as they got back to the stables, George’s father dragged him away to the castle, hardly listening to Dream’s apologies.

“Pretty unpleasant man, huh?” Sapnap muttered as soon as they were out of earshot, but Dream didn’t answer, crossing his arms and looking over at Sapnap with the same angry expression he had on earlier. “What’s going on with you?” Sapnap asked. “Are you mad at me because I went to protect George first? He didn’t even have a sword, Dream, what else was I supposed to-”

“I’m not mad at you because you didn’t protect me first,” Dream cut him off. He let out an exasperated sigh, then added, “I’m mad at you because you’d rather let me marry the man you love than let yourself be happy.”

“Wh- What? I don’t love George,” Sapnap blabbered. Where on Earth had Dream even got *that* idea?

Dream rolled his eyes. "You do, Nick, it's obvious. You can tell yourself whatever you like and try to come up with excuses, but the old you would have always put his duty to me first, no matter if someone else was unarmed or less able to defend themselves."

He grew silent and stared at Sapnap, his expression softening as he waited for him to answer, but Sapnap had no idea what to say. It was too much all at once, and deep down he knew that Dream was probably right but admitting it out loud would mean everything shifting for good, and it was a terrifying thought.

"I don't know if I love him," he finally said quietly. "I thought it was just physical between us, but I have to admit that when he ended things and started to give me the cold shoulder afterwards, it didn't feel good. Loving him, though... I swear I never even considered it as a possibility until you mentioned it just now."

Dream let out a scoff. "Of course you didn't. You're so self-sacrificial that you've been burying your feelings for my sake. And maybe it's partly my fault for not realizing what was truly going on sooner, but now that I know please don't ask me to ignore it."

"What do you mean?"

"The wedding is in two days, Nick," Dream reminded him gravely as if Sapnap could possibly forget at this point. "There's still time to call it off, but you're the one who has to make that decision."

"That's ridiculous," Sapnap protested. "I... I don't even know if he feels the same way about me."

"Find out, then, and once you know tell me what you decide," Dream said, shrugging like it was easy. It reminded Sapnap of the time George had suggested that he go ask Dream for his permission to bed him. Maybe George and Dream were more similar than Sapnap had realized.

He had no idea how George might respond but, the more he thought about it, the more it became clear that Dream was right. If he did nothing, didn't even *try* to go after what his heart was now begging for him to do, then he'd be miserable his whole life. Not only that, but he had a feeling that Dream would never forgive him for 'wasting' his happiness on him, which felt illogical but Sapnap could understand, in a way. He would have hated for Dream to sacrifice himself for his sake as well.

Which led to one major problem.

"What about you?" he asked. "Let's say that by some miracle George feels the same way, and you call off the wedding, and he and I can be together... *You'd* be back to square one with this marriage thing, and your parents might bring in another suitor like we feared, and..."

"Leave that to me," Dream interrupted. He now had fire in his eyes, but this time Sapnap could tell that it wasn't directed at him. "I've been too passive anyway, I think it's time I stand up for myself as well."

“How?”

“I’ll figure it out. Right now, it’s all up to you.”

He raised his eyebrows at Sapnap as if to say *Go on, then*, and Sapnap jolted into action.

Yesterday is clean and gone

Chapter Notes

Chapter title from [this Spelling song](#)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sapnap entered George's room without knocking and found him sitting on his bed shirtless, tending to the wound on his shoulder.

He started upon Sapnap's entrance, staring at him intently as he came to sit next to him on the bed, bandages, cloths and a pair of scissors lying between them.

“What are you doing here?” George asked quietly, turning back to his wound.

Faced with the significance of the moment, Sapnap was overwhelmed with anxiety, and he said, “Just wanted to check up on you,” leaving the truth for when he would feel ready to spell it out.

“I’m fine. It’s basically just a scratch, see?” George said, lifting up his cleaning cloth so Sapnap could examine the wound.

It wasn’t too serious indeed, just a cut a few inches long that had already started to scab over. Sapnap wondered if it would leave a scar, and if he would ever be able to press his lips to it if it did.

“Let me bandage it for you,” he offered, and to his surprise George consented without putting up a fight.

Sapnap worked quietly for the next few minutes, cutting up a bandage then delicately wrapping it around George’s shoulder, careful not to touch his skin even though he was craving to. When he was almost done, the silence had got too nerve-wracking and he broke it with the first thing that came to his mind.

“I’m sorry,” he said, tying up the bandage tightly and giving it one final pull to test it.

George had been staring at the fireplace throughout the whole process, as if deliberately avoiding Sapnap’s eyes.

“What for?” he asked, still looking straight ahead.

“I should have been more attentive earlier. If I had heard those bandits sooner, they would have never got that close to you.”

“It’s not your fault,” George shrugged. “Plus you came to defend me immediately, which... I know you weren’t supposed to do that. Did you get in trouble with Dream for it?”

“No, not exactly.”

“Not exactly? What does that mean?”

Sapnap paused. Maybe telling George that Dream was basically the reason for his being here now wasn’t the right course of action. He chose another approach. “Do you know why I came to your rescue first?”

“Can’t say I do, no,” George replied, sounding guarded.

“Really? You have no idea?”

George finally turned to face him. “I might have one, but I know it’s completely impossible so it’s useless to even entertain it.”

“Tell me anyway,” Sapnap pleaded. “Tell me what you think it might be.”

George let out an irritated sigh but complied. “Well, maybe you protected me first because you have feelings for me. But like I said, I know it’s impossible because you told me yourself that you didn’t, and because you didn’t fight it for one minute when I told you we should stop seeing each other.”

Sapnap shook his head. He had been so stupid about everything, but hopefully it wasn’t too late to fix it. “George...” he started, his heart pounding in his chest, “Do *you* have feelings for me?”

George didn’t answer. Instead, he got up and walked to his wardrobe, where he looked through his clothes for a moment before taking out a clean shirt. It was black. Sapnap had rarely seen him wear something dark before, and he couldn’t tear out his eyes from George as he put it on slowly, his eyes never leaving Sapnap’s either.

The air was thick with tension, and Sapnap wanted nothing more but to stride towards George, cup his face and kiss him senseless, but this wasn’t what he had come here to do—well, not primarily at least.

“I do, you know,” he blurted out.

George frowned. “What?”

“Have feelings for you.”

“But the other day you said...”

“I know what I said, but it was only because I was lying to myself at the time,” Sapnap interrupted him, the words now rushing out of his mouth. “I thought I was fine with only having a part of you, but it turns out I was not. I missed the moments when we just talked in the garden, when I felt like we were the only people in the world. I wanted more of that, more

of *you*, do you understand? So that's why I agreed when you ended it. Since I would never be able to have you fully, then... Then maybe it was easier not to have you at all."

There was an excruciatingly long minute of silence once he stopped talking, then George let out a groan and said, "I could slap you right now."

"What?" Sapnap asked, baffled.

"Why are you telling me this *now*? I'm getting married in two days, Sapnap, two days."

"I know, I just..."

"Shut up. Now it's my turn to talk, and you're going to listen to me, alright?" Sapnap nodded. "How can you even ask me if I have feelings for you when I've been courting you from day one? Why did you think I kept meeting with you after sundown, or gave you a rose, or... anything I ever did around you?"

"You said the rose was tradition," Sapnap muttered.

"I lied, you idiot. I just wanted to see you blush. Anyway, I thought you already knew how I felt about you, at least a little."

"I didn't, I swear."

"So you thought it was all just lust on my part?" Sapnap nodded with a blush, and George cringed. "Well, I thought the same about you, so I guess that makes us two idiots. Realizing it doesn't change the fact that I'm engaged to your best friend, though."

Sapnap cleared his throat. "About that..."

"What?"

"Maybe it's not my place to tell you, but Dream is willing to break off your engagement."

It took George half a second to react, then he started chuckling. "Wow, Dream sent his personal guard to tell me he's basically leaving me at the altar? What a gentleman."

Sapnap bit his lip with a grin. His heart felt like it would be bursting out of his chest any moment now, but before it happened he just had to make sure that they were truly on the same page.

"Is that what you want to do? Call off the wedding, I mean?"

"Well, my father would probably disown me if I did that, and I doubt I'd ever be able to show my face back home, especially if I told him that I did it so I could be with you."

"Oh," Sapnap said, his heart sinking in his chest. He knew that George's father would surely be difficult about such a decision, but he hadn't realized how dire the consequences might truly be for him. "You don't have to do it," he stammered. "I mean, I don't want you to lose

everything on my account. I'm just me, I don't think I'm worth you renouncing your title and your home and..."

"Sapnap, don't be so dense," George interrupted him, crossing the distance between them and coming to stand in front of him. He reached out and started to stroke his cheek, adding in a softer voice, "Of course you're worth it. I hate my title and everything it stands for anyway. As for my father... believe me, I'd be better off without him. And he would have never been happy with me, even if I had married Dream, so... Yes, I want to break off this engagement. As long as Dream manages to find a solution for himself, that is."

Sapnap closed his eyes, letting himself enjoy George's gentle touch, then whispered, "Dream seems to have some kind of plan. We should go talk to him about it."

"We should," George quietly agreed. "Just after I've done this, though."

He leaned forward to press his lips against Sapnap's, who returned the kiss eagerly and let himself forget about everything else just for the time it took to finally explore George's mouth until he felt breathless and satiated.

Dream was pacing back and forth in his chambers when they joined him (admittedly later than Sapnap had initially planned).

"Good, I see you two have finally come to your senses," Dream said with a smirk—what they had been up to was probably written all over their flushed faces and messy hair.

Sapnap turned redder in response while George winced.

"I'm sorry," he muttered, taking both Sapnap and Dream by surprise.

"You're sorry?" Dream repeated.

"Yes. I know this is putting you in a difficult position," George explained.

"*You're* not. We're only in this situation in the first place because our parents put us there. Plus I want you and Sapnap to be happy, so don't you dare feel guilty about this. Either of you, alright?"

They both nodded, even though Sapnap knew that it might take them a while to actually stop blaming themselves over it.

"Good," Dream said. "Now look, I've been thinking, and I believe I've found a solution that might work for all of us."

"You did? What is it?" Sapnap pressed.

"Well..." Dream started, laying out his plan in a few words.

His idea seemed pretty mad to Sapnap at first but, the more Dream explained it, the more he became convinced that this was indeed the only way for the three of them to get out of the mess they had found themselves into.

“Alright,” he said once Dream was finished. “It’s risky as hell, but I’m in. George, what do you think?”

“I don’t see what else we could do at this point,” George said. “So yes, let’s do it.”

The throne room was bathed in soft morning light. Sapnap watched it shift across George’s features as the three of them waited, apprehension turning their stomachs upside down.

Suddenly, the heavy wooden doors opened and court members started trickling in one by one, looking over at Dream and George with intrigue. No one knew why this gathering had been called at such an early hour, not even the King and Queen or George’s father, who all entered the room at the same time and immediately strode their way over to their little group.

“What is this about, son?” the Queen asked, frowning at Dream and George, then making a double take when she saw Sapnap standing right next to them instead of against the wall like he usually would.

“George and I have an announcement to make,” Dream answered evasively. “Please take a seat, you’ll understand everything in a minute.”

Sapnap could tell that they wanted to protest and demand to know everything immediately, but were kept from doing so by the hundreds of eyes observing them all across the room. So they quietly went to take their place at the royal tribune behind them, everyone’s hushed conversations fading into silence as soon as the King and Queen had sat down.

Dream, George and Sapnap were still standing and now all eyes were on them. Dream took a step forward, and Sapnap could see his hand spasm for half a second before he started speaking, the only sign in his demeanor that pointed to the fact that he was nervous. Sapnap doubted that anyone else had noticed.

“Thank you for coming here so early,” Dream started, and Sapnap marveled at how firm his voice sounded, carrying all the way to the back of the room. “I know this is unexpected but I wanted to tell you all that, after careful consideration, Sir George and I have decided not to get married tomorrow after all.”

The silence that followed was deafening. Sapnap glanced at the corner where all the royal advisers were standing, and could see confusion and concern painting their faces. The rest of the court members looked either shocked, disappointed, or a mixture of both.

As they were sitting behind their backs, Sapnap couldn’t watch Dream and George’s parents’ reactions, but somehow he could still feel the tension and discontent that were exuding from them. The King in particular must have been itching to intervene, but Dream beat him to it.

“Of course, Their Majesties as well as Sir George’s father were consulted and have given their approval.”

Sapnap internally smirked. Now there was no way the King would say anything, not if he wanted to avoid making a fool of himself in front of his entire court by admitting that he had lost control of his own son.

There was another moment of silence, then one of the senior advisers bravely cleared her throat and asked, “Your Royal Highness, may I ask what led to this decision?”

“Of course,” Dream said. “The truth is, the Duke and I are simply not in love, and we decided that going through with this marriage would therefore be unwise and untruthful. We are both committed to forging a strong alliance based on the friendship we have developed, though. In fact I have offered Sir George a place at the council table, effective immediately, and he’s welcome to stay and be a part of this court as long as he desires. On top of that, we are still committed to sign a treaty of peace and collaboration between our kingdoms in the exact same terms as the one we would have signed if we had gone through with this marriage,” Dream said, turning to bow his head at George’s father with deference, but the other man looked like he wanted nothing more than to snap Dream’s neck.

Dream turned back to face the court and, after taking a deep breath, said, “I also wanted to add that I will no longer be searching for a betrothed and that, when the time comes, I intend to rule alone or, more accurately, with the help of my trusted friends and advisers. I *will* have an heir but no consort, as I do not desire one.”

From all that Dream had said so far, this was the revelation that got the most extreme reactions out of the crowd. Some people turned to their neighbors, exchanging looks or even whispering in each other’s ears, while others seemed stunned, their mouths hanging open.

“I know this may come as a surprise to the majority of you,” Dream continued, “but I want to be very clear that nothing anyone could say would change the way I am, and the choices I might make in my personal life. In fact, I have been feeling this way for a long time, and I wanted to finally be honest with you all. I trust that you will understand.”

After that, everything felt a bit chaotic and Sapnap was almost too overwhelmed to follow what was going on. He knew that some advisers kept asking Dream questions that were barely-veiled criticism but that Dream stood his ground, while everyone else was gossiping among themselves in plain sight, something that Sapnap had never witnessed before. Even the guards on duty looked disconcerted by the news.

Sapnap kept sneaking glances at George, who was nervously biting his lip as he watched the room, his back rigidly straightened like he could tell that his father was currently shooting daggers at him with his eyes.

Eventually, it took an intervention from the Queen, who suddenly stood up, for the din to quiet down.

“You’re all dismissed,” she said in a cold tone, her voice barely loud enough for everyone to hear but still commanding respect.

Court members started to walk out the door in silence and the room progressively emptied until there was no one left but the royals and the advisers.

“You too,” the Queen told the latter, and they seemed discontent at having to go but obeyed anyway. “And you as well,” the Queen added, and it took Sapnap a moment to realize that she was talking to him.

“No,” Dream said. “Nick is staying.”

“Absolutely not,” the Queen answered, pinching her lips with disdain. “This is a private family matter.”

“That’s exactly why he’s staying,” George chimed in, speaking for the first time since the gathering had started.

Everyone turned to him, looking at him with varying levels of confusion. The Queen seemed to be the first one to understand what he meant, her narrowing eyes swiftly flying from him to Sapnap and back.

“Are you saying what I think you’re saying?” she asked George, who didn’t flinch under her cold gaze but held his chin even higher.

“Yes. Sir Sapnap and I are involved.”

The Queen took in a sharp breath, the only sound that disturbed the silence for a long moment. With a beating heart, Sapnap was waiting for things to explode, and they finally did.

“You can’t be serious,” George’s father said, grabbing his son’s wrist tightly in a way that must have hurt.

George snatched his arm away and stepped closer to Sapnap. “I am very serious.”

His father laughed incredulously, looking properly at Sapnap for the first time since he had arrived all those days ago. “You’re telling me that you could marry a Prince but instead you’re choosing to waste it all away for a guard?”

“He’s a knight and Dream’s personal guard,” George said, his fingers now grazing the back of Sapnap’s hand. “Not that it matters what his rank is. I would have fallen in love with him if he’d have been a beggar on the street.”

His father rolled his eyes. “Love? What do you know about love?”

“More than you do, clearly.”

“That’s enough, son. I don’t know what got into you, but I’m ordering you to put an end to this childish behavior and marry the Prince like we all agreed.”

“We’re not marrying each other,” Dream said, coming to stand on the other side of Sapnap, who felt strangely more protected and safe than if he was surrounded by his men. “Don’t you understand?” Dream added. “It’s too late to turn back now—we’ve already announced that

the wedding is being called off and the rumor must be spreading like wildfire as we speak. As I said, I'm still ready to negotiate an alliance with you so that your family and kingdom are protected by ours, but if you keep insisting that your son and I get married I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to leave."

"With all due respect, Your Royal Highness, you're not King yet," George's father spat.

"Indeed he is not," the King finally intervened. In this moment, he looked to Sapnap like an old and tired man, instead of the unflinching monarch persona he usually put on.

"Good," George's father said. "So we can all agree that this is preposterous and that the wedding needs to go as planned?"

"Yes, of course," the King said.

George interlocked his fingers with Sapnap and said, "If you don't agree to cancel this wedding right now, I'll be marrying Sir Sapnap tonight instead."

"What?" his father spluttered.

"You heard me. And you can try to keep us from doing so all you like, but just remember that Dream and Sapnap are the best knights in the kingdom, and they're ready to fight for this. Right?" he asked, turning to Dream, who nodded, then Sapnap, who mumbled "Um, yes," even though he felt completely out of his depth.

This hadn't been part of the plan. Was George just bluffing, or was he actually ready to go through with it if it came to that? Now wasn't the time to dwell on it, though, because it seemed that they had come to a standstill, the three older adults clearly looking for other options but failing to find them.

Eventually, it was the Queen who spoke. "You really thought of everything, haven't you?" she asked, turning her attention to Dream.

"Why do you look so disappointed?" he replied. "Why does it matter to you that much that I marry someone? Don't you think I will be a good enough King if I rule on my own?"

She sighed. "I think you'll be a great King," she said to Sapnap's surprise. "I just don't want you to be alone."

"I won't be alone," Dream replied, his voice softening. "I'll have my friends, my advisers, my people, and maybe even my child. So can you please just accept that I don't want a consort?"

For the first time, Sapnap could see her start to give in to Dream's arguments. It was counting without the King, though.

"Having a consort is tradition," he said, and Dream rolled his eyes.

"If we were living as per tradition, we'd still be fighting with wooden swords. Now, the choice is yours. Either you all accept our terms and we sign a new treaty, or George and

Sapnap marry each other tonight, and I'm sure you're all eager to avoid that kind of scandal, right? But whatever option you choose, George and I won't be marrying each other."

Sapnap's palm turned clammy into George's hand as they waited for the final decision. George was squeezing his fingers tightly and, on Sapnap's other side, Dream had his shoulder pressed against his.

What Dream hadn't mentioned was that, if worse came to worst, the three of them were planning to flee the kingdom and start anew somewhere else. It hadn't been Sapnap's idea, in fact he was fiercely against it because he knew how Dream was attached to his home and his role despite the weight of his responsibilities, and having to give them up would surely be heartbreakingly for him. But Dream had insisted that they'd at least keep that option in mind as a kind of last resort solution.

With increasing anxiety, Sapnap wondered if this was where things were heading—George, Dream and him settling down in some faraway village where no one knew who they were, making a living by growing vegetables or building furniture or something. Maybe it wouldn't be that bad, actually. He and George might even have a garden and...

"Very well," the Queen said, tearing him out of his rambling thoughts. "I don't think I'll ever understand your decision but you're an adult, Dream, and maybe it's time we trust you to know what's best for yourself."

"I... thank you, Mother," Dream stuttered, having clearly not expected her to cave in that easily. Maybe she wasn't such an awful mother after all, Sapnap thought. Maybe it was her circumstances that made her act so rigidly.

The King seemed surprised by his wife's words as well but only showed it for half a second before saying "Fine. We won't be there to see you regret that choice when the time comes anyway."

And with that he stormed out of the room. Dream turned pale, probably with anger, but turned to George's father and calmly asked him if he was ready to look over the treaty that he and George had hastily drafted the night before.

At this point, George's father had no choice but to accept.

When he put the feather down on paper and signed it with a flourish a few minutes later, Sapnap finally allowed himself to breathe.

They were out of the woods.

It was pouring rain outside, making a soothing background noise in George's room, where he and Sapnap had sought refuge as soon as his father had disappeared in his carriage down the road.

Dream was with his own parents, probably trying to mend what was still fixable.

“No walk tonight,” George remarked, his nose pressed to the cold glass of the window, his breath leaving condensation that kept appearing and disappearing.

“I guess not,” Sapnap said. “Your poor father must be freezing cold right now.”

“I don’t care,” George whispered.

Sapnap got up and came to stand by his side. “Are you alright?”

George had hardly said a word since everything had gone down in the throne room and his father had decided to go back to his own kingdom as soon as he had signed the treaty, not acknowledging his son as he had prepared for his trip.

“Yes, of course I’m alright,” George said. “Things turned out as well as they could have, didn’t they?”

“Except that your father left without saying a word to you.”

“I don’t care,” George repeated stubbornly. Sapnap doubted that it was the entire truth but he let it go for now—George would talk to him about it whenever he felt ready to.

He wrapped his arms around George’s waist and rested his chin on his shoulder, closing his eyes for a moment while George put his hands over his, keeping them warm.

“We could be married by now,” he said, and Sapnap’s heart fluttered.

“You really meant it, then?”

“Of course I meant it. Did you think I was just bluffing?”

“No. Or maybe. I don’t know. We’re just so... new.”

“We’re not that new. Are you saying you wouldn’t have said yes?” George asked, his body tensing up.

Sapnap rushed to reassure him. “Don’t think I don’t love you, because I do, alright? In case that wasn’t clear enough. And I *would* have said yes, if it had been our only option. But in a way I’m glad it wasn’t, because I feel like we’ve been doing things out of order, and I just... I want to know so much more about you, George, and about what we could be. And if I marry you, I want it to be out of choice, not obligation, because I think we both deserve that.”

George didn’t say anything for a minute, letting his words sink in. Then, he slowly turned around to face Sapnap and kissed him gently, more gently than he ever had. Sapnap still found it difficult to believe that this was theirs to have now, that if they wanted to, they’d be able to do this for years to come and there was nothing anyone could say or do to prevent it. When they pulled away after a minute, George said, “You’re right about the marriage thing, I think. And I love you too, but you probably already figured that out long ago.”

“I didn’t, to be fair. For the longest time I thought you were playing games with me or something.”

George snorted. "That's because you're so loyal that it made you dumb. I still think that you knew, though, deep down. You just didn't want to see it because it would have ruined everything for Dream. But look, it didn't, right?"

"Hopefully not," Sapnap said, biting his lip. "Maybe we should go check on him."

"Alright."

They walked down to Dream's chambers hand in hand, not caring about the looks that they might receive from people they passed on the way.

It would have been an overstatement to say that Dream's parents suddenly grew more approving and supportive of their son, but at least they seemed to understand that his decision was irrevocable.

As time passed, things slowly got less and less tense and they started having cordial conversations with their son again. Sapnap doubted that it would ever get to a point where they could be one united and happy family, but then again he guessed that it had never been the case in the first place. He knew that Dream was sad about it, just like George was sad about the situation with his own father, but it seemed to just make them even more determined not to repeat their parents' mistakes in the future. Dream kept repeating that he couldn't wait to have a child and show them as much love as they deserved, and sometimes George nodded gravely to that, as if he was thinking of how he himself might act once he was a father—something that almost made Sapnap feel giddy with excitement.

It wouldn't be anytime soon, though, as they had both agreed to start from scratch and properly court each other, now that they were both finally on the same page. Not that it really changed anything, as they kept going on their evening walks and spending nights together, but now Sapnap didn't have to leave as soon as dawn showed up behind the windows, and they could have breakfast together in bed whenever they liked. On top of that, they had made little to no effort to hide their relationship and it seemed that the entire kingdom knew about it within just a few days. At first the gossiping was nearly unbearable, but soon it seemed that the appeal of novelty faded away, replaced by some new scandal that involved a royal adviser. Even the King and Queen eventually stopped looking at them with wariness like everything had been their fault, and after a while things went back to normal, if normal was even a thing for them all to begin with.

One year later

Sapnap was pacing back and forth in Dream's chambers while Dream was watching him from his seat, looking amused.

"Are you nervous?"

“What kind of question is that?” Sapnap asked, rolling his eyes. “I’m about to propose, obviously I’m nervous.”

“I don’t understand why, he was ready to marry you a year ago already.”

“But things were different. We weren’t properly together then, not like now.”

“I thought that this would make things easier?” Dream frowned.

“No! What if sometime over the past few months he’s realized that he does like me, but maybe not enough to marry me? I mean, I wouldn’t even blame it for it, we bicker a lot and maybe he thinks it would be too much to commit himself to that kind of relationship for the rest of his life, you know?”

Dream let out deep sigh as if he was dealing with a stubborn child—which maybe wasn’t that far off, actually.

“Alright, listen to me very carefully. First of all, you’re an idiot. Second of all, George loves bickering with you because he loves you and his way of showing it getting a rise out of you. Anyone can see that except you, apparently. Third of all, he’s going to say yes. So go ahead and ask him already. You have to leave anyway, I have lots of meetings tomorrow and I need my beauty sleep.”

“Oh, sorry,” Sapnap muttered. “What are the meetings about?”

“Well, no one knows about it yet, but my parents are thinking of abdicating.”

“What? Why?”

“They say they’re getting old and tired and don’t want to waste their last few years dealing with the kingdom’s affairs.”

“So that means that you’d become King earlier than planned?” Dream nodded. “And are you fine with that?”

“I am. The surprising thing is that they are.”

Sapnap hummed. “It’s a good sign, I guess. It shows that they finally trust you enough to handle that responsibility.”

“Yes, I guess. It’s just strange to think that a year ago, they were still pushing for me to marry George, and now they’re ready to surrender their power over to me.”

“I don’t think it’s that surprising,” Sapnap argued. “I mean, you’ve been more and more involved with all the political decisions lately, and evidently you’ve proven yourself up to the task. Plus, maybe it’s the old age making your parents a bit softer.”

Dream snorted. “Maybe. Anyway, I don’t think it would happen before the summer at the earliest. Not before you put a ring on George’s finger, at least. Speaking of, you were supposed to be out of here five minutes ago.”

“Right, right,” Sapnap chuckled. “Talk later?”

“Anytime,” Dream smiled. Sapnap gave him a quick hug before walking away, Dream whispering “Good luck” in his ear, to which Sapnap cockily responded “Won’t need it” even though his heart was already threatening to burst out of his chest with apprehension.

George was kneeling by one of the rose bushes, wrinkling his nose at it.

“Which color is that again?”

“Pale pink,” Sapnap replied absently. Usually, he would have made a teasing remark about George’s inability to distinguish certain shades, but tonight the last thing he wanted was to get into an argument, even a playful one.

George must have sensed that something was unusual in his tone because he turned his face towards him and narrowed his eyes.

“Everything alright?”

“Do you remember the first time we came here together?” Sapnap asked out of the blue instead of answering his question.

“Of course I remember. You told me you hated me,” George replied with a grin like this was the most hilarious memory he had.

Sapnap scoffed. “I did no such thing.”

“Well, it was heavily implied.”

“I didn’t hate you. I just didn’t know if I could trust you. And alright, maybe I did hate you a little, but only because I realized deep down that I wanted you, but I thought I could never have you.”

George hummed. “Did you ever wish that I had never come here?”

“Back then I did, sometimes,” Sapnap admitted. “Not anymore, though. Not in a very long time. Obviously.”

“Obviously,” George repeated with a smile. “Anyway, why did you ask me that?”

“I’ve been just thinking about it lately. About how far we’ve come. You know, it’s been about a year since your and Dream’s wedding was canceled,” Sapnap blabbered, trying and failing to find a way to bring up what he really wanted to say. Well, ask.

“I know,” George said. “You sound nervous, what’s going on?”

Sapnap came to sit by his side on the grass. The proper thing would have been to kneel but George was already sitting down, plus they had never done things the proper way anyway.

“A year ago,” he started, trying to tame his breathing, “you were prepared to marry me.” He could see George shift at the corner of his vision and decided to close his eyes, not feeling brave enough to face him as he finally asked the question. “Would you still be prepared to do that today?”

There was an unbearable moment of silence, then George started chuckling.

“Hold on, are you proposing? Is that why you’re sounding so nervous and won’t even look at me right now?”

“Y- yes,” Sapnap stuttered, forcing himself to open his eyes.

George continued to laugh for a few seconds then seemed to take pity on Sapnap and shuffled closer until he could bump their shoulders together.

“Of course I’ll marry you, you idiot. I would have said yes if you’d have asked a year ago, or last winter, or even in ten years.”

“Oh. Alright,” Sapnap said, letting out a breath.

“Alright,” George mimicked him with a smirk. “Now kiss me and let’s go back inside.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading! Let me know what you think if you want :)
I'll have 3 (!) fics out next week for SNF week 😊

End Notes

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Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!